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133

Issue 133 | January 2017

plus

- Bold and colorful illustrations
- **Capture enchanting moments**
- Generate expressive sketches
- **Speed paint magical light effects**
- Reimagine Theseus and the Minotaur
- **and much more!**

Distinctively surreal artworks

Discover the characterful
creations of freelance illustrator
Gediminas Prancevičius

Editor's Letter



ANNIE MOSS
Junior Editor









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Welcome to 2dartist issue 133!

In issue 133 we speak to background designer Kiersten Eagan about how she uses her art to tell stories, and illustrator Gediminas Prancevičius talks to us about his career so far. We also take a look at the personal plein air studies of Pixar illustrator Noah Klocek, and Rachel Ho talks us through how she maintains flow in her sketches.

Also in this issue, Sina P. Kasra reimagines the tale of Theseus and the Minotaur, James Wolf Strehle begins a new series teaching the fundamentals of fantasy concept art, and Peter Goethe shows how to speed paint magical lights. You can also see how to illustrate atmospheric sci-fi and fantasy scenes, paint a dark fantasy shaman, and much more!

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Kiersten is an illustrator and designer for television and film, having worked on titles like *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* and *Mr Peabody and Sherman*. She is currently designing backgrounds for the *My Little Pony* Netflix series.



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Gediminas Prancevičius is a freelance creative illustrator, working and living in Vilnius, Lithuania. His work includes character design and creating illustrations for picture books, music album covers, and advertising.



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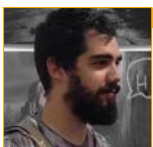
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James is a concept artist and illustrator in the games industry. He works for Volta where he is afforded the opportunity to create art for some of the biggest games in the industry.



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IRINA NORDSOL

Irina Nordsol is a self-taught artist born in Yakutia. She is currently working as a freelance illustrator in Moscow, Russia, and creates dark, macabre illustrations in Photoshop.



IOAN DUMITRESCU

Ioan Dumitrescu is a freelance concept designer from Bucharest, Romania. His recent projects include *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* and a 360-degree VR environment for the 100th anniversary of BMW.



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We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: annie@3dtotal.com.

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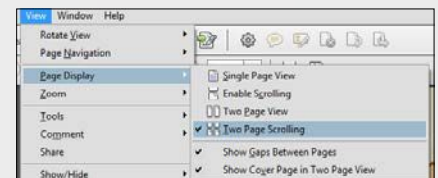
If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

Top tips for viewing

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Jump to articles

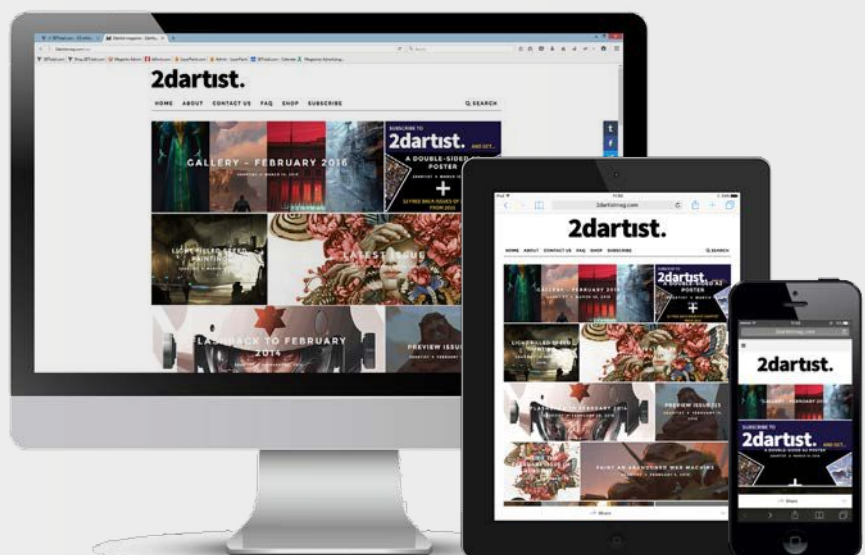
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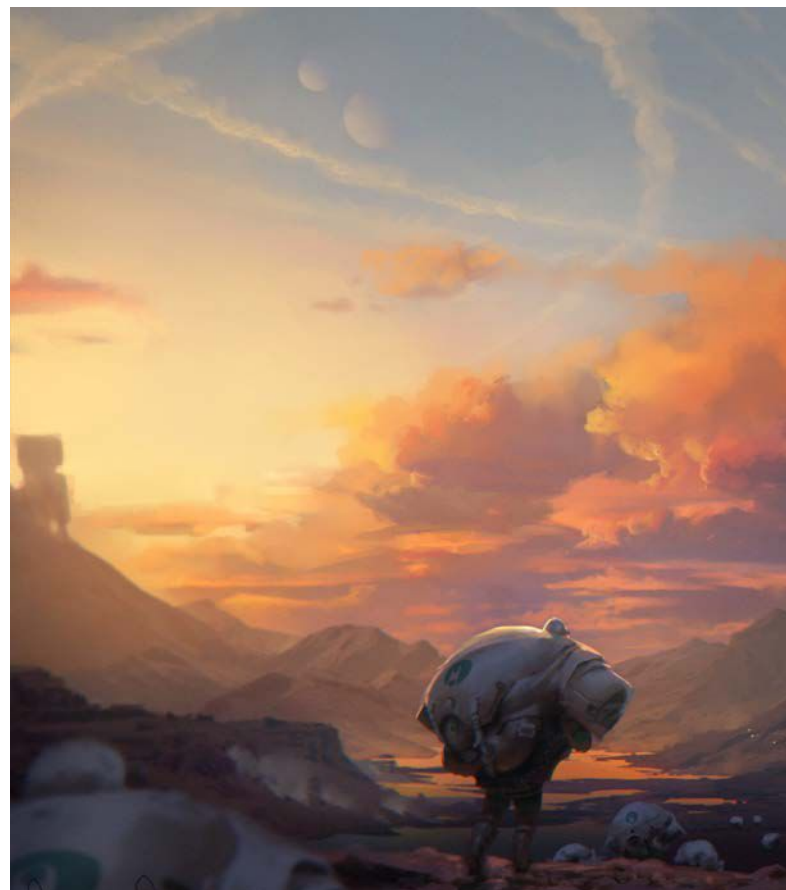
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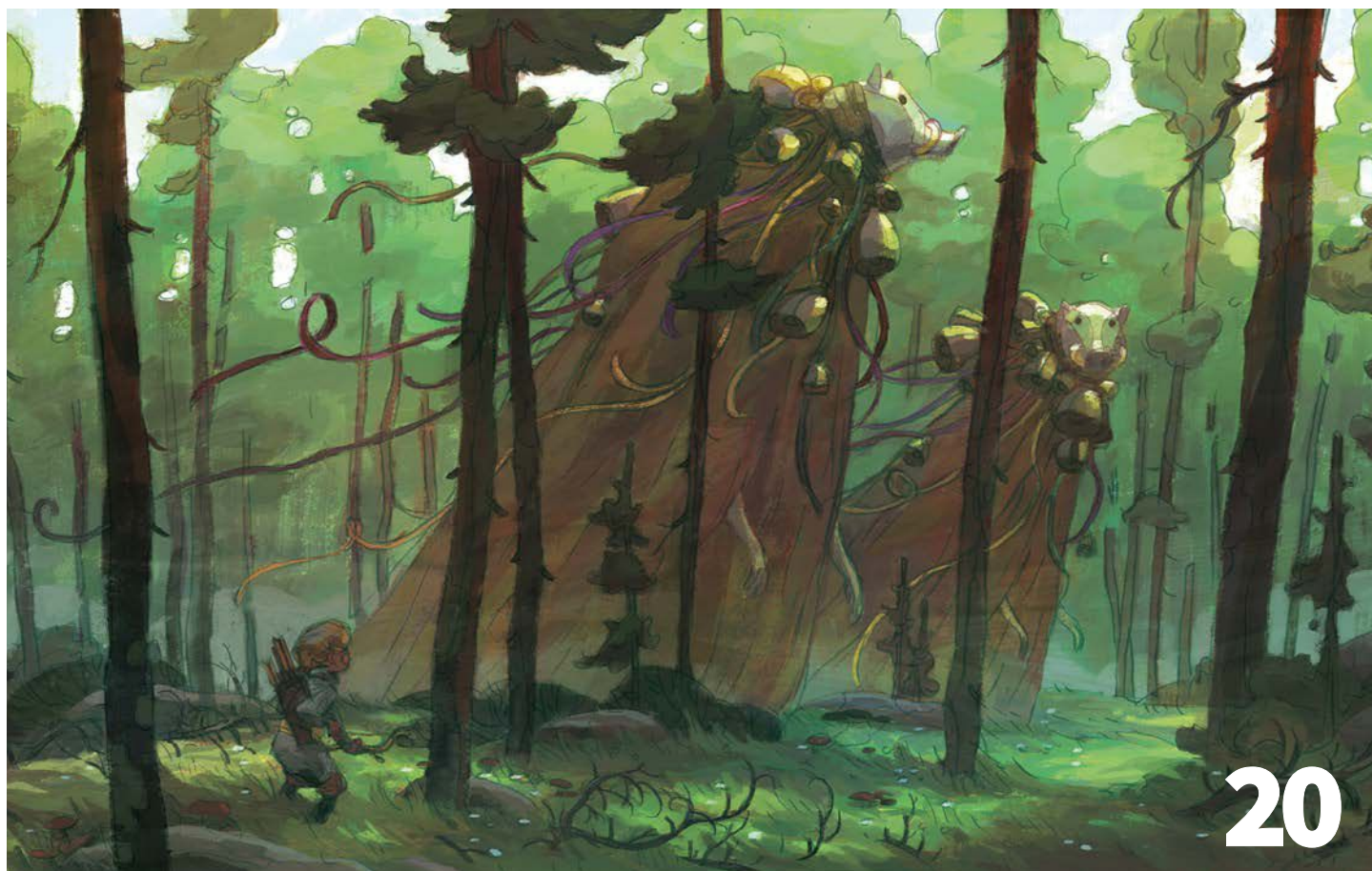
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The Artist



Kiersten Eagan
kiersteneve.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Kiersten is an illustrator and designer for television. She is currently designs backgrounds for the *My Little Pony* Netflix series.

Bold and colorful illustrations

We talk to illustrator and designer Kiersten Eagan about what keeps her inspired and how she channels her creativity ▶



Vancouver based designer Kiersten Eagan loves using her art to tell stories. Since graduating with a BFA in Illustration she has put her name to some well known children's shows including *Mr. Peabody and Sherman*, and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. At the moment she is working as a background and color artist on the Netflix show *My Little Pony*. Kiersten's favorite projects to work on are ones where she can collaborate with other artists and learn and grow from the experience. When she is not working she spends as much time outside as she can, traveling to new places, or spending time with family and friends...

2dartist: Hi Kiersten, thanks for talking to 2dartist! Could you start by introducing yourself a bit to the readers?

Kiersten Eagan: Hi! Thanks so much for having me! I am an illustrator based in Vancouver, Canada, with a passion for storytelling. I currently work as a designer for television, and work freelance on children's books as well as a variety of other side projects. I love finding inspiration and stories to tell from my travels whenever I can. When I was growing up we moved around a lot and lived in some very rural settings; this gave me a lot of time to myself so I became a keen observer of life, exploring within

my imagination, which has lent itself well to life as an artist. I love working in a field that allows me to channel my curiosity for life in a creative way!

2da: Your works have a really bold style with bright colors. Do you have any tips for readers who want to recreate this in their own work?

KE: Absolutely! I get a lot of inspiration from mid-twentieth century illustrations and cartoons where bold, bright colors are very prevalent, so I would suggest finding those types of resources to inspire you. In addition, I always find it very helpful to paint from life – this will increase your understanding



● New Day – illustration inspired by a summer camping trip

of color and light, as well as allow you to better manipulate or exaggerate colors effectively.

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any other artists you particularly admire?

KE: I feel like I could be here all day listing artists who inspire me! Some that really stand out are Maurice Noble, Kevin Dart, William Joyce, Jim Henson, Tadahiro Uesugi, Floriane Marchix, Julia Sarda, Emily Carr, Miroslav Sasek, Paulina Suarez, Scott Wills... to name a few! Also all the amazing friends I've had the pleasure to study or work with constantly inspire me

with their creativity and work ethic. I also get a lot of inspiration from traveling, reading, watching films or just life in general; it might be something that happens that inspires a story, or something as simple as how the light looks on my way to work that can trigger an idea.

2da: If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why?

KE: I would like to meet Walt Disney to ask him about his experiences during the early days of animation, and what he thinks of animation today. I think someone who demonstrated

such exceptional innovation within the field would have particularly interesting insights into the current state of the industry, and what else might be possible moving forward.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with? Are there any brushes you find yourself using again and again?

KE: I work primarily with Photoshop for both work and on personal projects. I really enjoy experimenting with texture and different brushes, but there are five to ten main brushes that I always come back to and use most often. ►



● North Pole – concept art piece for an animation project





⚡ PRO TIP

Clarity

Be as clear as possible in your portfolio and in your communication about what you want to do. Ideally if someone is looking through your portfolio they won't even need to ask what position you're applying for, because the work provided will make it clear what you specialize in and where you would fit in. In addition, once you're working in a studio or for a company don't be afraid to communicate where your interests lie. It took me awhile to feel like I was good enough to ask to work as a designer but it happened quickly once I made my interests clear.

2da: Which tools and software do you use? Are there any you would like to learn in the future?

KE: Aside from Photoshop, I also work with Flash at the studio where I am currently working. As technology continues to advance at an ever-increasing pace, I am always interested to learn more about new tools and software. However, I am most interested in improving my design skills because unlike technology that can come and go, these skills will always be relevant and can be applied with any software or tool.

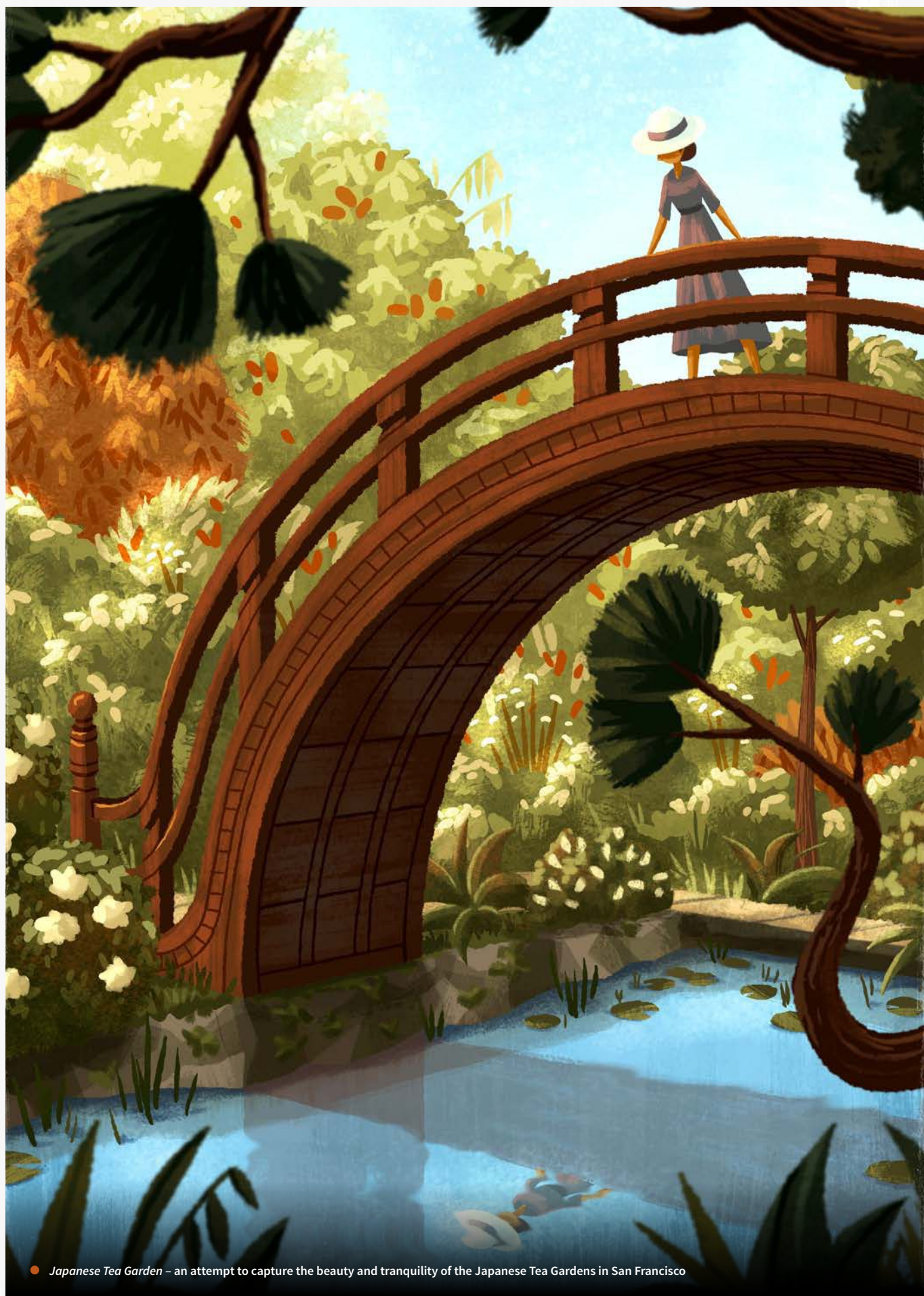
2da: How would you describe your job to a group of aliens, who have no idea what an artist is or does?

KE: I think I would try to show them what it was by drawing their portrait... and just hope they like it enough to not wipe out the human race!

“The best thing I could suggest is to constantly keep learning and developing your craft whenever you can find time”

2da: What advice would you give to someone who is struggling to launch their career as an artist?

KE: The best thing I could suggest is to constantly keep learning and developing your craft whenever you can find time. Even if it's just fifteen minutes here and there, all those moments will add up and will make a difference. Also, try to get ►



● *Japanese Tea Garden* – an attempt to capture the beauty and tranquility of the Japanese Tea Gardens in San Francisco



● Winter in Central Park – image inspired from a cold walk through Central Park while visiting New York City

involved in the artist community in some way – online, in person, go to conferences if you can, be good to people, and don't give up. I got my industry break by talking to the person next to me in a yoga class, so you really never know what opportunity might be just around the corner!

2da: What makes a project fun for you?

KE: For me a project is fun when it presents an opportunity to be creative, to learn, and to collaborate with other artists. I've really enjoyed working on projects in the early stages when we are brainstorming ideas and are encouraged to be as creative as possible. The freedom to experiment like that is so exciting! But I've also enjoyed working on shows that already have an established style and universe, such as *My Little Pony*, because it gives me the opportunity to study and learn from everything they have done, as well as the challenge of fitting into that. It's an opportunity to learn and grow, which I really enjoy. And of course working with other artists who I get to learn from and laugh with all day is always a pleasure!

2da: Are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into, and why?

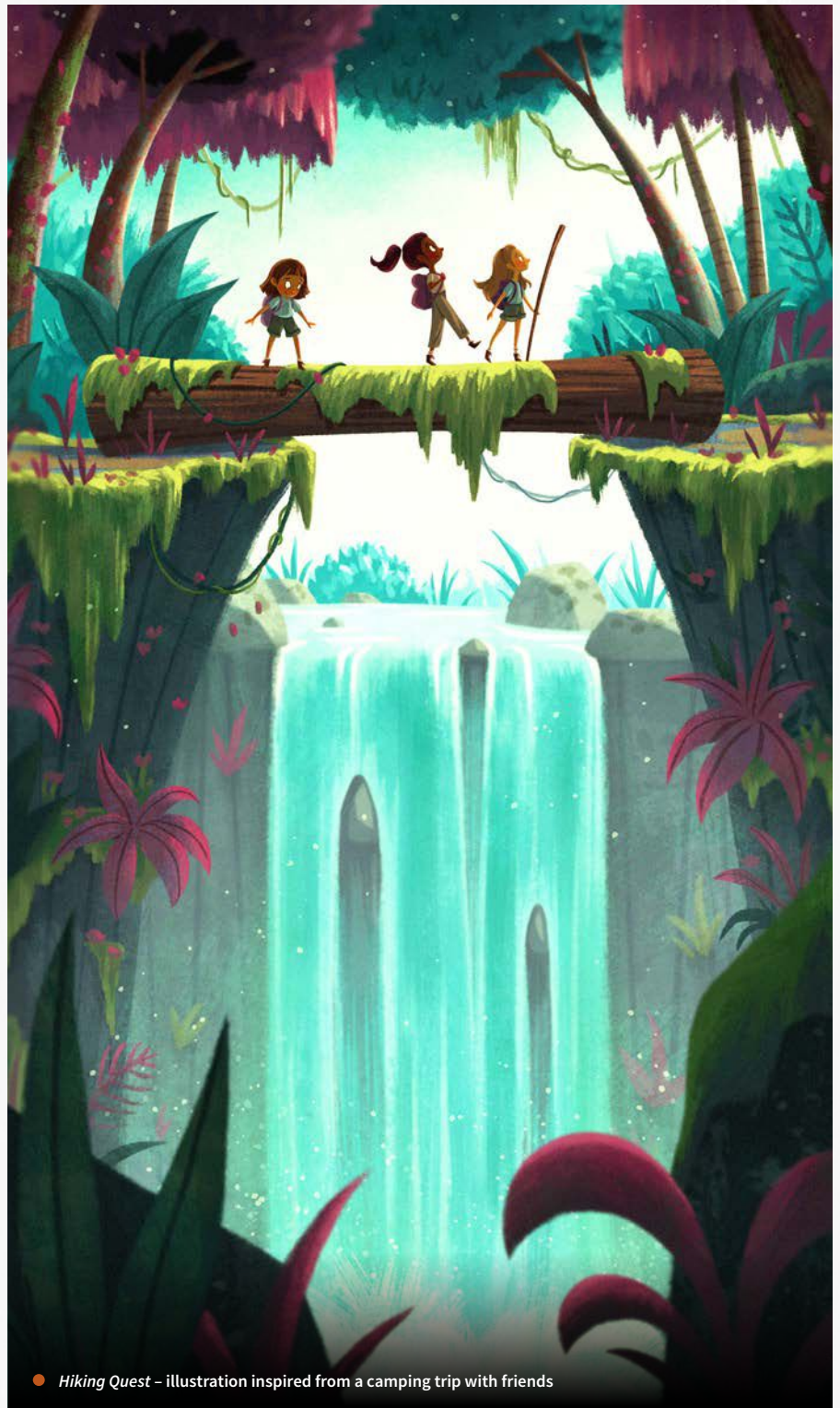
KE: So far I have only worked on 2D animation projects, which has been such a gift but I would like to explore designing for 3D projects in the future as a way to challenge myself and expand my skill set.

2da: What do you find most challenging about working as an artist?

KE: I think the most challenging part about being an artist for me is managing self doubt. There are so many incredibly talented people in the industry, and I am always aware of how much I still have to learn. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming. I try to manage those feelings by focusing on doing the best work I can every day, and being just a little better than I was the day before.

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

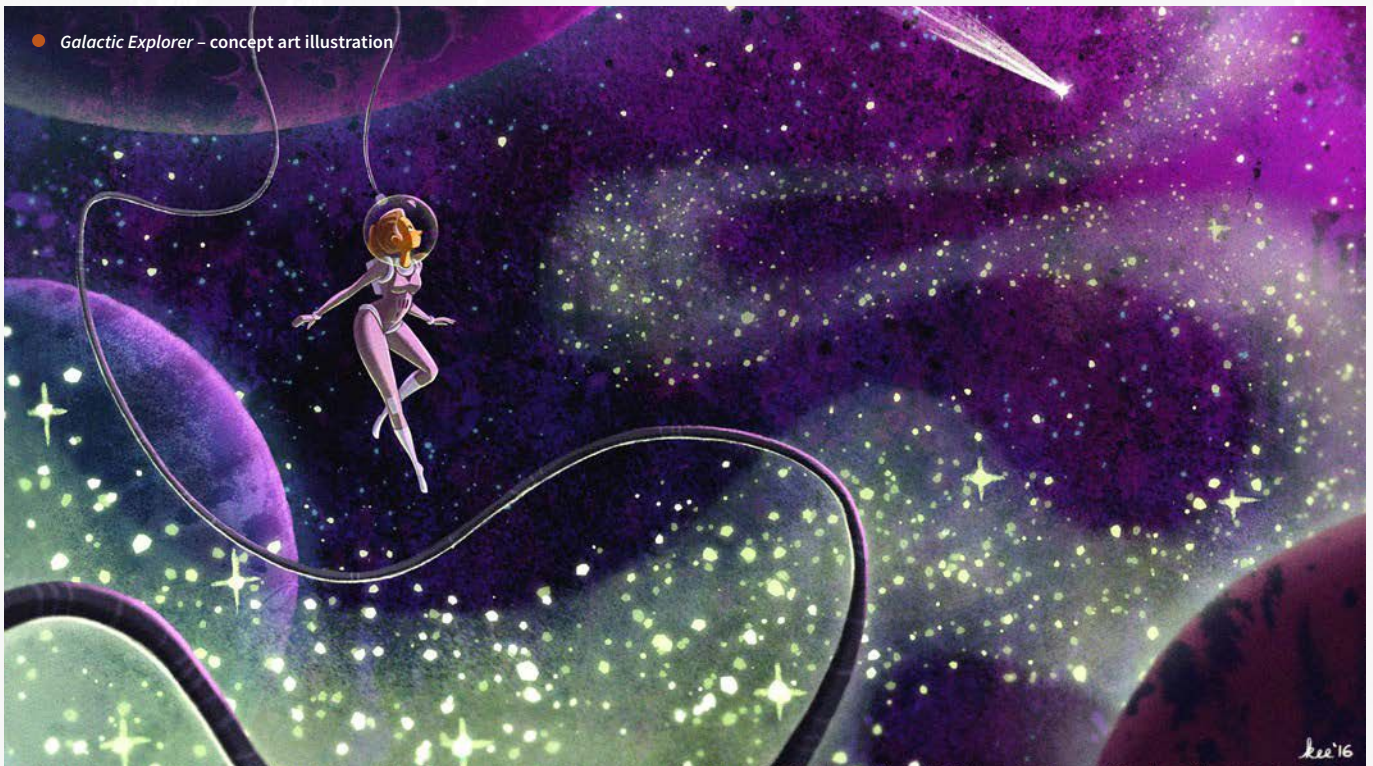
KE: To stay motivated on a difficult project, I try to break things down into smaller goals; sometimes a huge project can feel overwhelming, which is never good for creativity, so I find it helpful to set and focus smaller goals. I also think it is important to take breaks, which might seem counterintuitive if you are working towards a deadline, but even a ►



● *Hiking Quest* – illustration inspired from a camping trip with friends

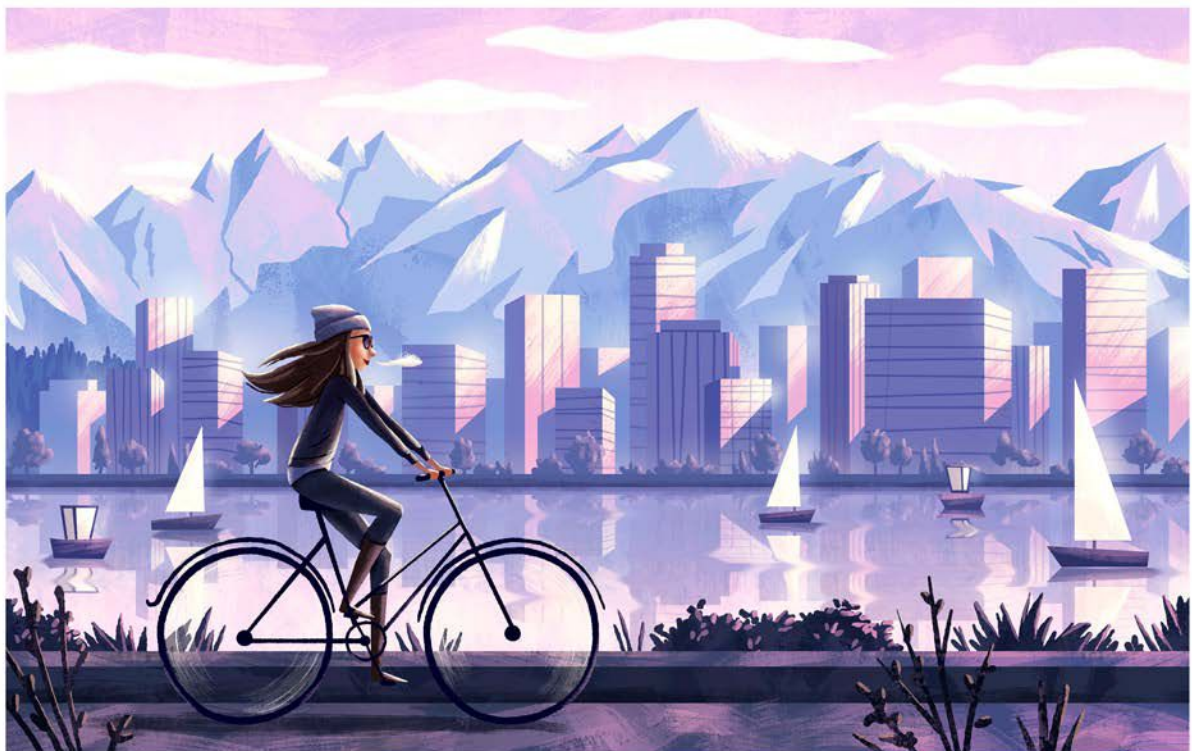
If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

KE: That's tricky! I'd be tempted to tell myself that it was all going to work out okay, but I think that fear, although stressful, is such a great driving force to keep improving as an artist. I guess I would tell myself I was on the right track and not to worry about finding a style, following trends, or worrying what anyone thinks about my art – just keep creating as much as possible and to enjoy every second!



Kiersten's significant artwork

This is one of my older paintings, so there are a lot of things I would change about it now, but it was one of the first paintings I did based on my own personal experiences. It was after a period where I had been focused entirely on commercial work, but hadn't taken time out to just work on art for myself. I had so much fun working on this that it encouraged and kept me motivated to work my personal projects. This in turn has kept me feeling creative and inspired, and it is something I can channel into both personal and commercial work.



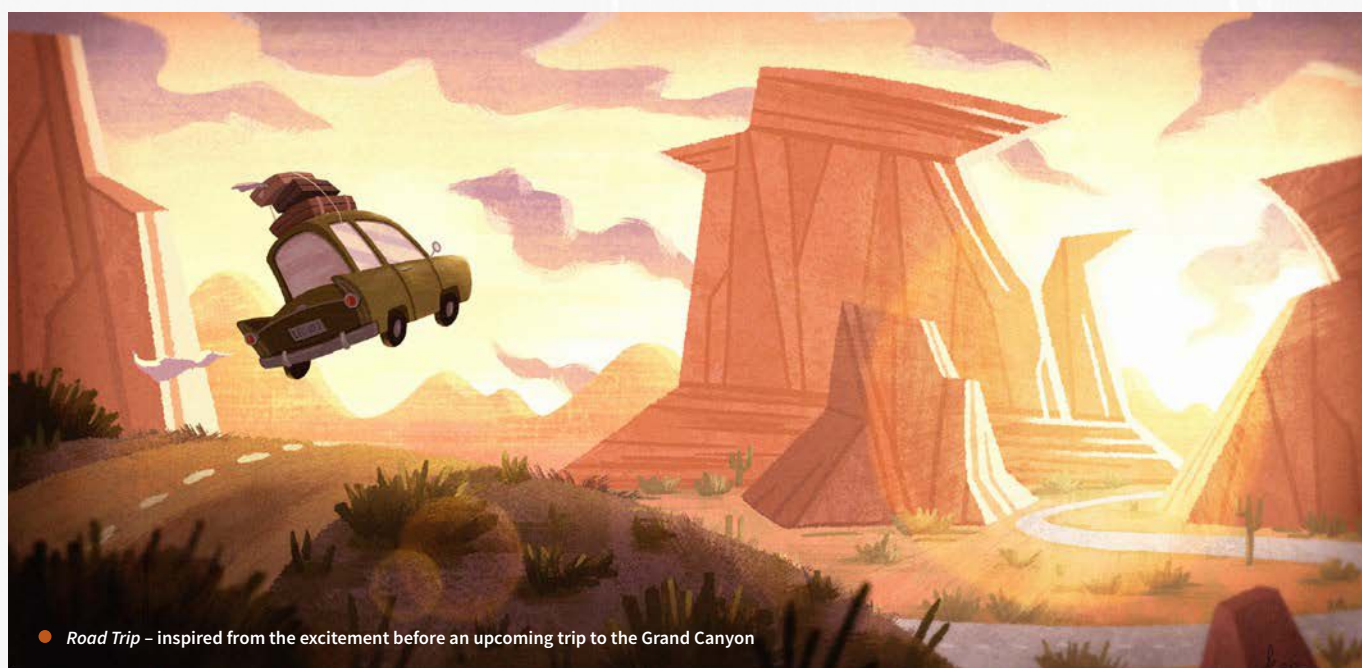
● *Book Nook* – image for a children's book project







● *Market Hide Out* – inspired from exploring the markets of Peru



● *Road Trip* – inspired from the excitement before an upcoming trip to the Grand Canyon

🕒 Artist Timeline Kiersten's career so far

2011: Graduated with a BFA in Illustration from the Academy of Art University, California, USA

2012: Hired as a designer for RocketOwl game studio to create content for Facebook games

2012: Color artist for TiKEouse animation studio

2013: Hired with DHX Studios as a BG Layout artist on *Dr. Dimensionpants* television series, moved to Vancouver, Canada

2014: Worked on animated series *Looped* as a background artist for layout and color

2014: Hired as a background artist on DreamWorks' *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* Netflix series

2016: Worked as a BG layout artist for Sony's *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* television show

2016: Began working as a background designer and color artist for *My Little Pony* Netflix series

quick walk can help to trigger ideas or keep you refreshed and working hard. If I am struggling to keep focused I work uninterrupted for forty-five minutes, take a fifteen minute break and go back to work (and repeat if necessary).

Lastly, I do my best to eat healthily and exercise during especially challenging projects, so that my body and brain have the resources they need for the task.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

KE: When I'm not working I love to go and be outside, especially as so much of my time is spent in front of a screen. Vancouver is an amazing place to live. I love hiking, camping, biking, snowboarding, or just going to the beach whenever I can! If I have a long break between projects I love to go traveling, especially to see cultures or places different from my usual experiences.

I love tap dancing (even though I'm terrible at it!) and of course spending time with friends and family is always a pleasure that leaves me feeling refreshed when I head back to the drawing board!

2da: And finally, what should we look out for from you in the future?

KE: A lot of the shows I've been working on such as the *Mr. Peabody and Sherman Show*, or the current episodes of *My Little Pony*, will be released in the coming year or two. We have all worked really hard on these projects and I'm very proud of what we've created together, so I'm really excited for people to see them!

I am also working on two children's book projects that are at various stages of development and should be released within the next two years. Lastly, I am hoping to put together a book of personal paintings and sketches that I hope to show and distribute by this time next year... so I guess now that I've said it out loud I should get working on it! ●

Thank you Kiersten for talking to 2dartist!



● *Beneath the Waves* – personal illustration

The Artist



**Gediminas
Pranckevičius**
gedomenas.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Gediminas Pranckevičius is a freelance creative illustrator, working and living in Vilnius, Lithuania. His work includes character design and creating illustrations for picture books, music album covers, and advertising.



Distinctively surreal artworks

Gediminas Pranckevičius discusses his career and showcases his illustrations for picture books, album covers and software developers ▶





Although he originally studied fresco painting at Vilnius Academy of Arts, Gediminas Pranckevičius found a career as an artist difficult to sustain after graduating. For five years he worked instead for a cinema theatre creating advertising material, until a director invited Gediminas to work on a feature animation movie, and he was at last able to pursue his true passion. Since then Gediminas has developed a name for himself creating illustrations for children's picture books, album covers for bands, and character designs.

This month Gediminas shares a selection of his work and discusses how his career has developed. He explains why he believes going outside is a better source of inspiration than online research, how listening to artist talks keeps him motivated, and offers advice on improving fundamental painting skills.

2dartist: Hi Gediminas, thanks for talking to *2dartist*! Could you start by introducing yourself a bit to the readers?

Gediminas Pranckevičius: I was born in Panevėžys, a small town in Lithuania. I think my first art seeds were planted in childhood while visiting my uncle. I remember unfinished oil paintings and the odor of oil paint filling my nostrils all the time. Also I used to visit the theater a lot because my grandma was a ticket taker there. I can still remember details of the play coming out of the dark in dramatic lighting. Mom worked as an administrator at the mask theatre orchestra. I guess an environment like this was the perfect starting point for my creative career!

I wasn't a very good pupil at school but I really loved to draw, consequently I joined art school and later enrolled at an art academy which helped

me choose fresco as my specialty. Straight after finishing a Master's degree I found a job designing advertising brochures and flash banners at a cinema theater; it wasn't exactly what I was trained for so after a while I quit to pursue my real passion. Since then I have worked as a freelance artist.

2da: Your works have a really distinctive style which often plays on the exaggerated characteristics of your subject. Do you have any tips for readers who want to recreate this in their own work?

GP: I've never tried to find my style, it's still developing. I like to change between work types. If I'm finishing illustrating a children's book I'll take something different for my next project, maybe play a bit with 3D and mix it with matte painting. And if I'm doing something just for myself, for pleasure, the style will be different as well. ▶

● *Silent Place* was made with an iPad Pro, Apple pencil and the Procreate app. Procreate commissioned this work, and asked for something with a sail, connected with nature for its protection. © Savage Software Group Pty Ltd





● *Light*, a children's book illustration



● *Unicorn Valley*, another children's book illustration



There was this younger artist who asked me some time ago: "How does one find their style?" And without prior analysis I just told him to relax, don't try to look for anything. If you work from your heart the style will find you itself. Now looking back, maybe it's actually a good answer. You just simply need to feel pleasure in what you're doing, don't let yourself be stressed when deadlines are tight, and just calmly push forward.

2da: Where do you find inspiration for your work? Which other artists do you particularly admire?

GP: I get inspiration from old Master paintings, digital art, life, music, silence. It would be easier to say what I don't admire! But maybe I just don't understand something yet. I love mannerism, Rococo, romanticism, realism, impressionism, surrealism and so on. There are so many great artists the list could fill this article!

Contemporary and CG artists are popping up everywhere. If you're looking too much at their stuff you can get a bit mad. People need to go outside and enjoy the nature more often. If you're more into robots then explore factories, if you're into zombie illustrations try to investigate some rough areas in the city, I'm sure you'd get more inspiration. There was recently an article in the local press about an old guy who went for jog in the forest and got lost. He was only found after two days; I'm certain he would be able to art direct a new *Hobbit* sequence from the experience.

2da: If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why?

GP: Well if I could ask any long-dead Master, I'd surely ask them how they would live their life if they could do it again. I'd also ask what they would ask if they could meet another dead artist. . . Also I would be curious to see how they use a Wacom tablet. I think it would be interesting to hear what Rembrandt would say.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with? Are there any tools you find yourself using again and again?

GP: When I'm working with a PC, Photoshop is the king. Sometimes I do compositions and some small elements in 3D. I also like to paint on the go, if this is the case Procreate and an iPad are the tools of choice. I try to experiment with new tools; however Photoshop is still my number one tool. ►





2da: Which tools and software would like to learn in the future?

GP: Once I thought of trying to learn Unity or something similar. I'd like to export my drawings into virtual reality. At an exhibition, for example, it would be awesome if you had prints hanging on the wall and a VR headset hanging to the side so the viewer could explore the drawing from within. It would be great to walk, fly around, and hear that environment. All in all I think software tools are improving

so fast, you won't even need to learn soon. You'll be able open a new tool soon and just intuitively know how it works.

2da: How have you adapted and developed your skills over the course of your career?

GP: I did not learn a lot at VDA (Vilnius Academy of Arts). I was living the student life rather than studying. When I started working I had to look at the fundamental rules of art again

and it was very exciting to start learning about color, composition, design, and so on.

No matter how long you learn you still tend to forget those principles, so before I do any serious work I'll make notes and highlight what is important in that particular drawing. It helps me to remember the important stuff. Skills only develop when you are actually using them on your works. It's actually the best way to gain them, so even if you're starting with weak skills,



they'll slowly become more obvious. Practice trumps theory and we all still have a lot to learn.

2da: What do you most enjoy about working on a new project?

GP: The fun part about being an artist is that you never know what your next work will look like. I find myself learning and exploring new topics based on the work theme. It's something similar to having kids: it's fun in the beginning then challenges and ►

If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

Dear Gediminas, don't be afraid. I am you from the future. Get yourself a tattoo on your chest: the biggest mistake you can ever make is being too afraid to make one. Life is like riding a bicycle; to keep your balance you must keep moving. Life is not about how hard you hit it but about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. There will never be a point in your life where it's the right time to do a great thing. If you're waiting for that perfect moment, or that perfect timing, it's not going to happen. You know what you have to do? You have to create the perfect time, and the perfect opportunity, and the perfect situation. Just do it. Start now.



● *Offline* is a personal piece which was created while relaxing after work. It is a reminder for others to relax as well







responsibilities follow suit. The beginning of any new project is very intriguing and interesting. Everything is about to happen and there's plenty of time ahead.

2da: Are there any other areas in the art world that you'd like to branch into and why?

GP: There was very little hope of getting a job within the fresco painting field when I was studying it. Nobody needs frescos when you can simply print wallpaper. Lately I've been fascinated by street art. I'm following an artist called Dulk, and I would love to put my drawings on large walls so that my artwork could be seen in real life as well, not only on the internet. I think it's good to be outside just in general.

2da: What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project? Do you dive straight into sketching or do you have a more analytical process?

GP: First translate and try to understand if I clearly get the idea behind the brief. Analyzing it is very important. I'm looking for materials and references. Trying to live with the thought of the task and try not to rush things.

Sometimes you get the inspiration to do a sketch, wait a few days and realize it's no good. It's better to wait until an idea has matured. It's difficult to create something original. Sometimes you think that your idea is so good but then you see dozens of the same idea online.

From one point of view it's bad to Google as you just get upset with all the great artwork that's already there, on the other hand you can cherry pick the best ideas, ignore what's bad, and combine everything into your own interpretation.

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

GP: I like to listen to podcasts or interviews from people who have achieved something. One of my favorite artists for this is Bobby Chiu. I also love Steven Silver's art talks. I like to listen to the experience of famous people such as actors and directors talking on Charlie Rose's show.

When you see that they are just people with the same troubles and problems as you, it becomes easier to stay motivated. You understand that there are no special powers and you just need to keep on moving forward. ►



Gediminas's significant artwork

A significant point in my career was when I quit my job at the cinema theatre, where I worked for five years designing adverts and putting time schedules for movies on popcorn boxes. I met a director who invited me to work on a feature animation movie based on Mahabharata, an Indian Sanskrit epic. At the time I was working on that film, I made this monkey. It was a job where I had to read a script and paint. It was a dream job.



2da: Can you tell us anything about the projects you are working on at the moment?

GP: I'm making cover illustrations for books right now. One cover that I'm working on right now is for an animated series. The main character is a human who became a frogman. It was very interesting researching how frogs develop, and I'm learning a lot of interesting information about this species. There are so many fantastic organisms living on our earth.

I've also recently done some concept art for a sci-fi film, working on an advertisement and working with a survival man on the cover illustration for his new release. I have a variety of projects happening at once so I never get bored!

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

GP: I spend my time with the family. Together with my lovely wife and two sons, we like lying on the sofa and watching films on late winter evenings.

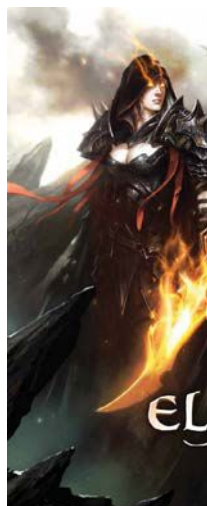
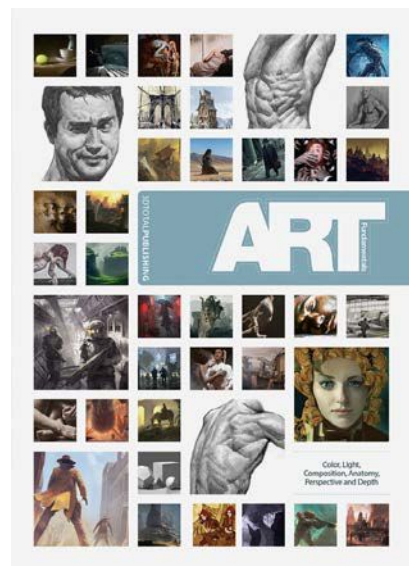
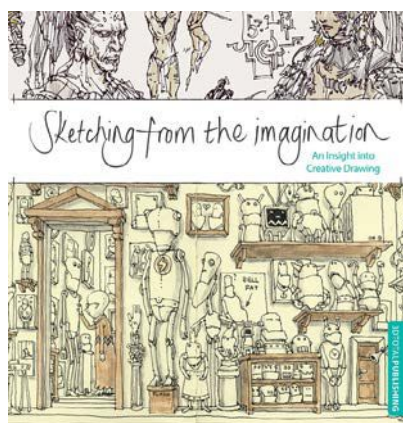
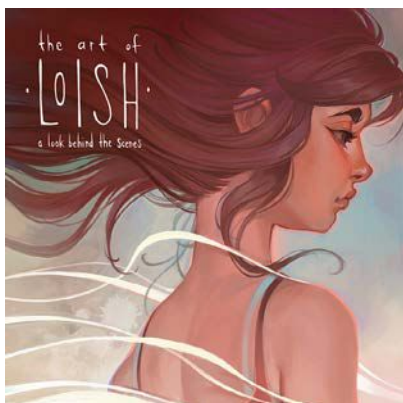
2da: And finally, what should we look out for from you in the future?

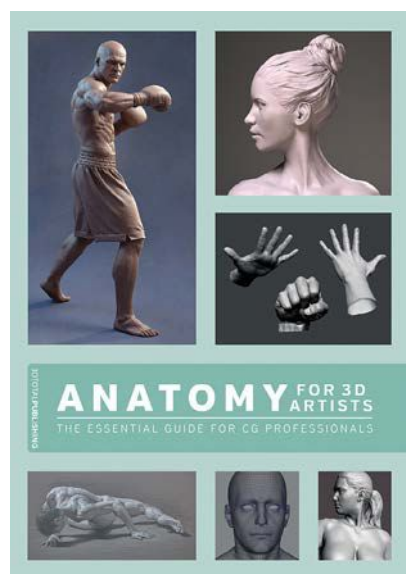
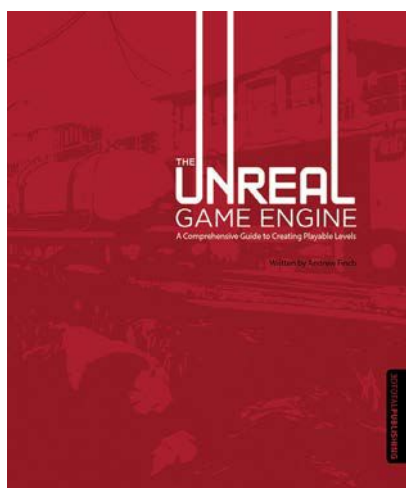
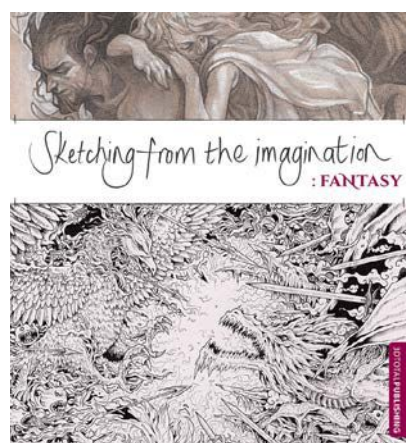
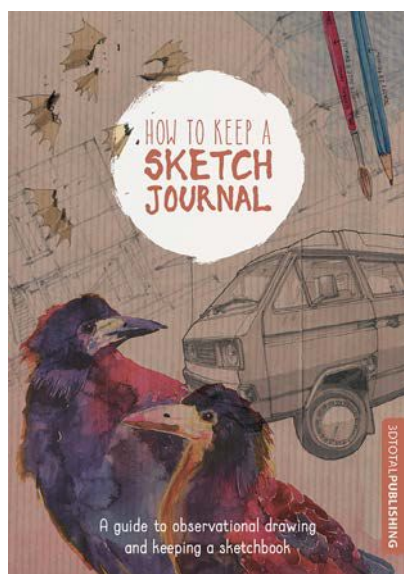
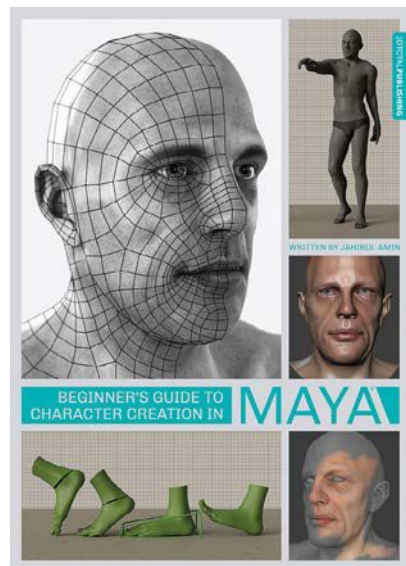
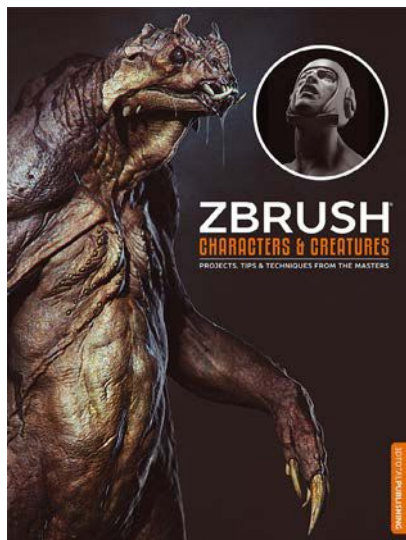
GP: I've made illustrations for five children's books for four different authors, and I think I'll release a book of my own sometime as well. Maybe I will do a Kickstarter project. I would also like to make a mobile game at the same time. ●

Thank you Gediminas for talking to 2dartist!













Noah Klocek
imageblock.com

Noah Klocek is an artist and writer whose work includes writing and illustrating picture books, visual development, art direction, and production design for studios such as ILM, PDI/DreamWorks, and Pixar.

A R T I S T S P O T L I G H T

Capturing enchanted moments

Noah Klocek shares his beautifully emotive illustrations and explains how practicing his skills with plein air studies has become an important part of his family life ▶

Passionate about creating visually arresting artworks that tell a story, Noah Klocek has so far lead an exciting career at internationally renowned animation studios including ILM (Industrial Light & Magic), PDI/DreamWorks and Pixar. In addition to his day job, Noah also works on many of his own projects including writing and illustrating picture books, launching *Cloud Country* in 2015 and two further books yet to be released.

To keep his drawing skills sharp, Noah also incorporates plein air drawing practice into his regular weekend hikes around San Francisco Bay with his two young daughters. It is through his plein air studies that Noah

is able to document his family's adventures and share his love of art with his children. Here, Noah talks to us about how he balances his many projects, why research is so important to storytelling and shares his tips for developing your drawing skills.

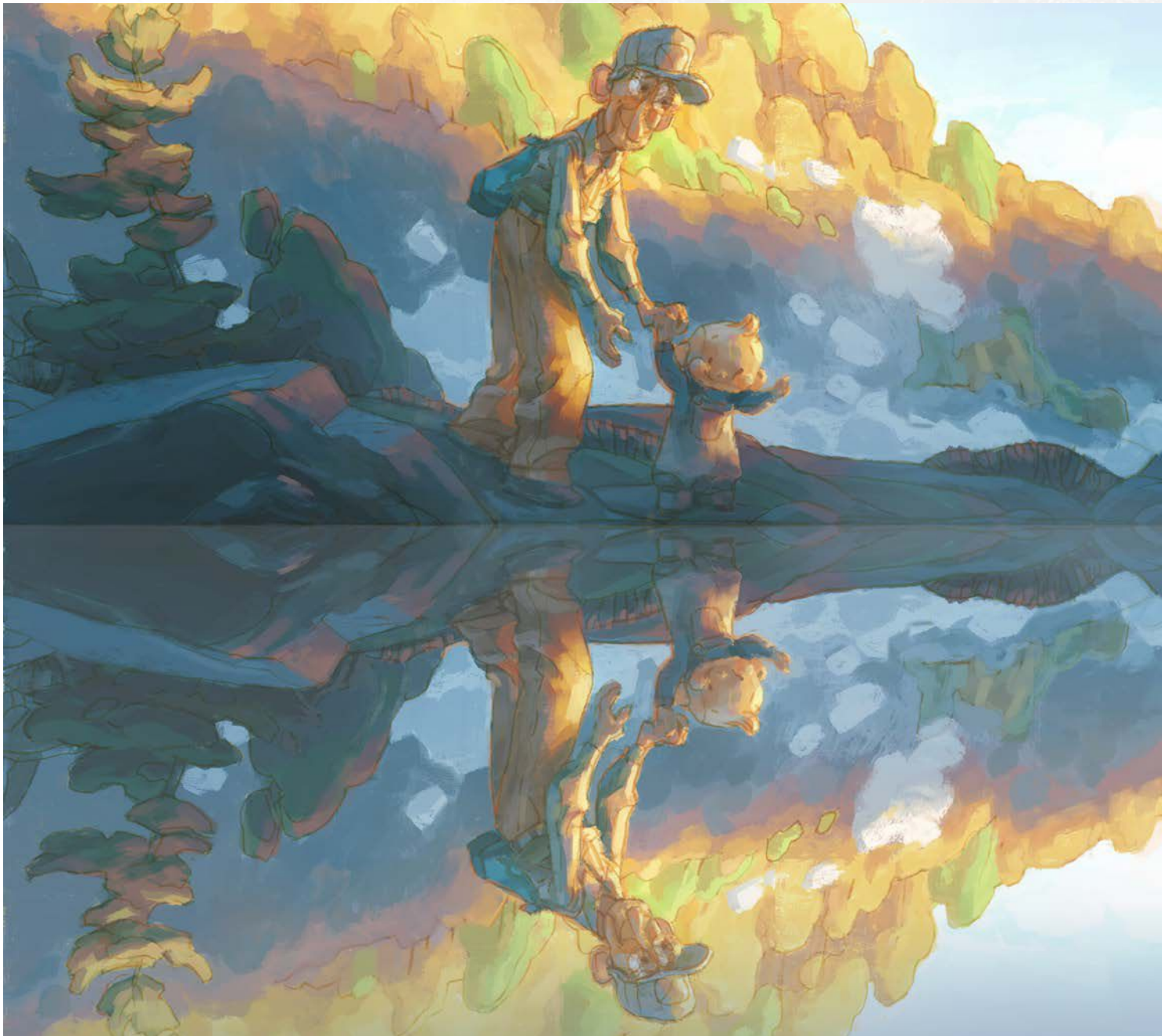
2dartist: Hello Noah! Thanks for talking to *2dartist*. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Noah Klocek: I'm the son of two artists who spent their professional lives as educators. After graduating SJSU (San José State University) with a degree in Animation/Illustration, I was hired by ILM as a matte painter. I then worked

for a few years at PDI/ DreamWorks, before moving to Pixar Animation Studios as a visual development artist. Currently, I have been at Pixar for eleven years, working as a designer, an art director and a production designer. For most of my career, I have also done plein air painting on the side to keep me sharp, as well as developed and illustrated picture books.

2da: What or who encouraged you to take up a career as an artist?

NK: No one really encouraged me to take up art as a career; in fact, my parents had me try out a bunch of other options in junior college just to make sure I made the choice knowing ►





● An illustration of the wilderness opening up



● An illustration for one of Noah's personal projects

what I was asking for. My parents did encourage me to be an artist at heart though, by making sure I always had a love for art as well as books and the materials to make art as I grew.

2da: Your work is centered around telling stories, can you walk us through your process and how you go about interpreting a story visually?

NK: The basis of my visual storytelling process is research. For me research is like learning a language. If I do a poor job at this, there is little hope I will do a good job in telling a story. Research may take weeks, months or even years for a film. Once I truly understand the visual language I need to tell the story, I break down the story into simple visual terms. Sometimes this is just simple geometric shapes or colors. Next is a slow process of doing thumbnails, building these up into layouts and on to final illustrations.

2da: You've also been busy creating plein air paintings. Can you tell us a bit about what drew you to this process and how it influences your other artworks?

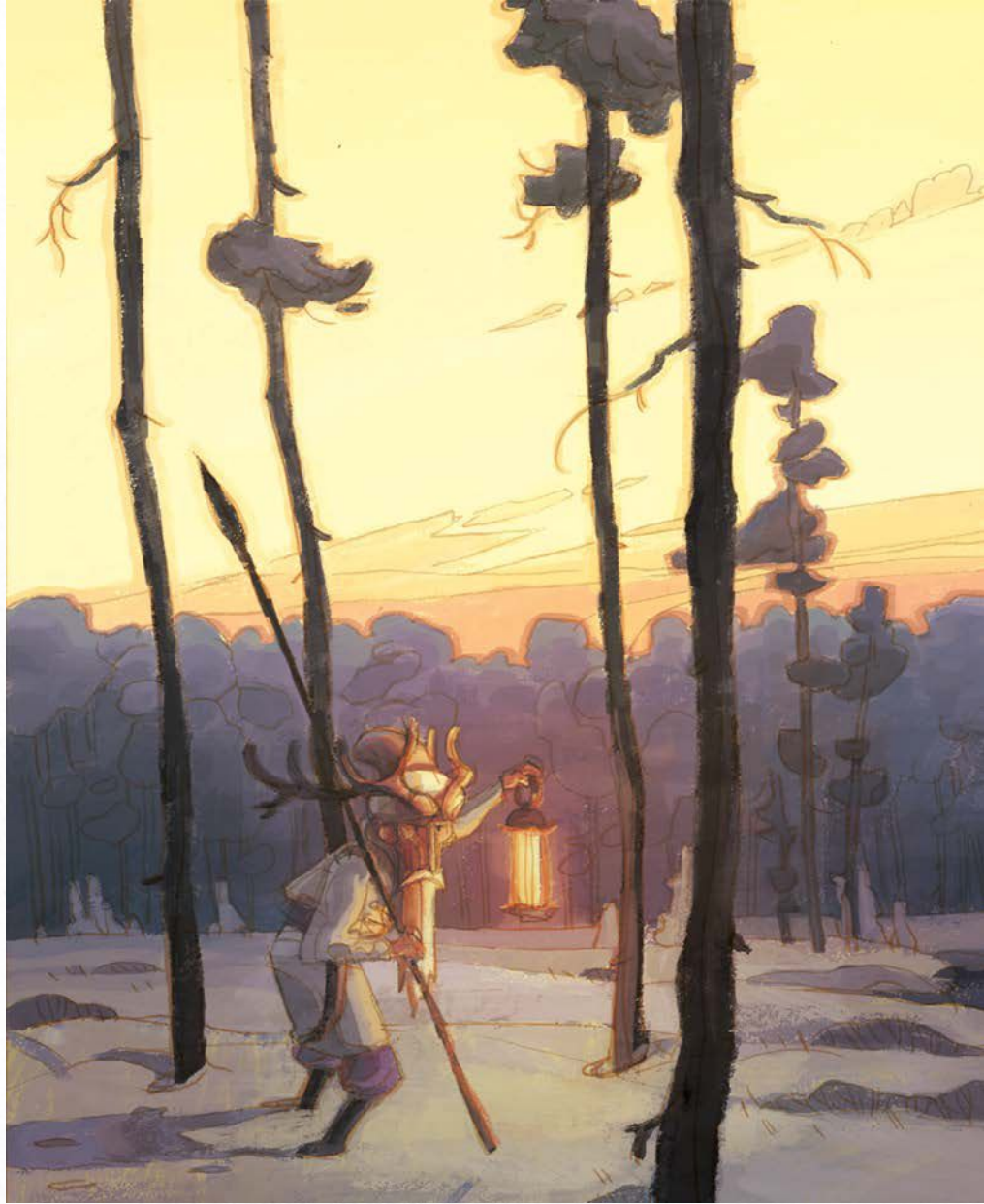
NK: I didn't start doing plein air until I was working at DreamWorks. My purpose and goals have evolved over the years, changing the most with the birth of my daughters. For a while I gave up plein air painting, as it was impossible for me to get out during the day to paint. Soon however, I started taking my daughters out with me for hikes and sneaking paintings in as they ate or played. Now, they have started painting with me every weekend and I have started adding them into my paintings to tell a story of our adventures.

2da: Do you have a favorite place you like to go to draw?

NK: My daughters and I have a lot of favorite places to hike; particularly around the San Francisco Bay area to hike in nature, like Point Reyes and Mount Diablo. I would say these are my favorite to draw.

2da: What advice can you give to our readers who want to develop their drawing techniques in a similar manner?

NK: I would say pick a medium you like (I choose pastels because they are easy to set up and take down) and head out and paint. Don't worry about how good you are or how ►



● An illustration from *Yuri and the Golden Plum*



● An illustration of Melvik from *Yuri and the Golden Plum*



⚡ NOAH'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

This painting was the first time I added my daughter to my plein air paintings. For me this work has been a game-changer creatively and emotionally.



nice each painting turns out. Just try to learn something new or get better at one aspect of your work every time you head out.

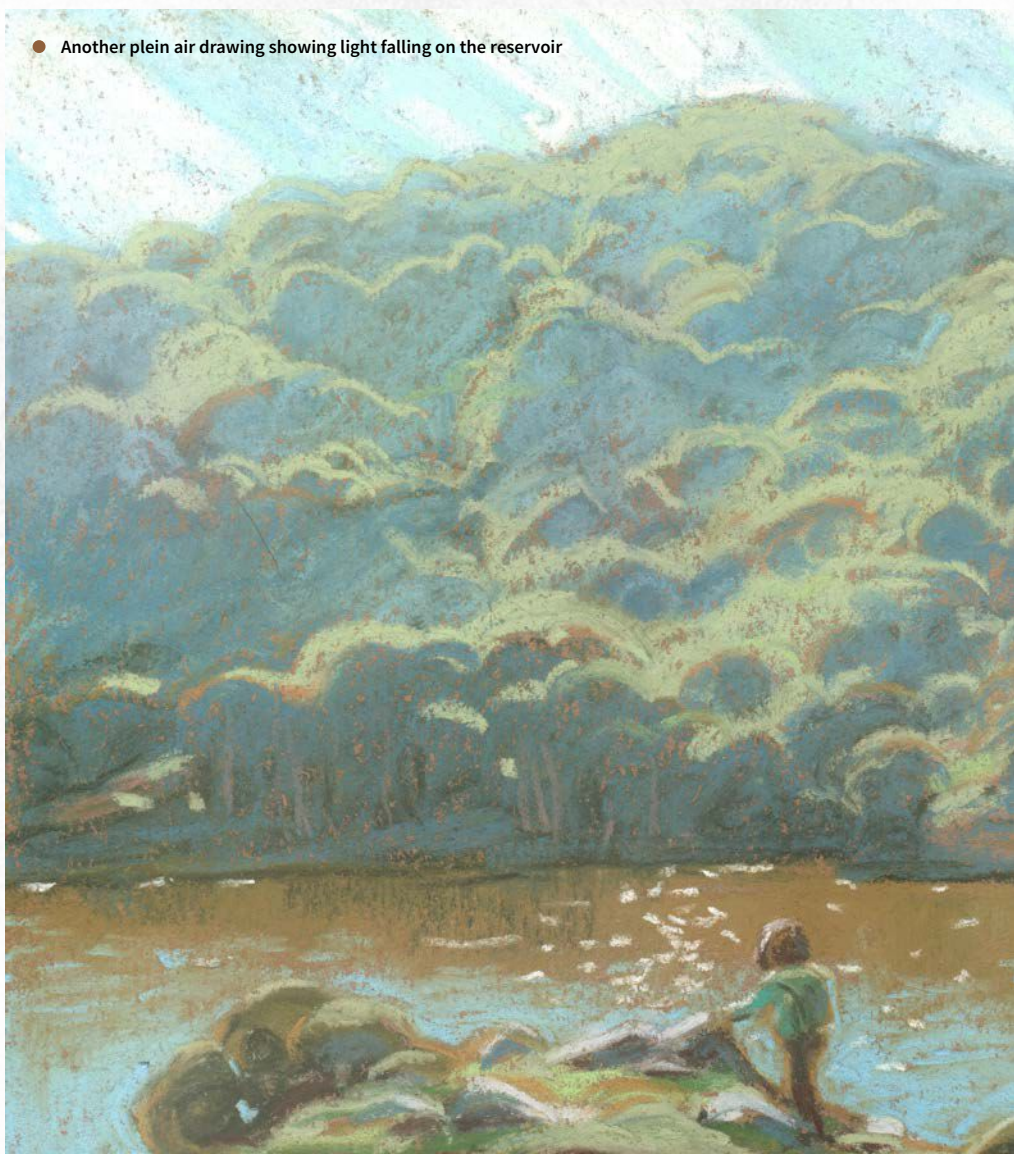
2da: What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

NK: I chose pastel after trying both acrylics and gouache. For me it was all about ease of setting up. When I started I was heading out at lunchtime, with no more than an hour for the whole process. Setting up an easel, paints and water ended up being too much. I do want to get back into gouache someday, but I'm happy with my set up right now.

2da: Where do you turn to for inspiration? Are there any artists you like to reference?

NK: Most of my inspiration comes from life, but I have been inspired for a long time by the work of A. J. Casson and the rest of the "Group of Seven" from Canada. I love the work of N. C. and Andrew Wyeth most. I also love the landscapes of Grant Wood and his friend Marvin Cone. My peers at Pixar also inspire me a great deal, I feel lucky to work with and learn from them every day. ►

● Another plein air drawing showing light falling on the reservoir



● A plein air drawing of Noah's daughter in the land of the water fairies



● A plein air of a hike at Point Reyes



2da: What has been your favorite project to work on so far?

NK: This is a nearly impossible question to answer. I love a lot of projects for a lot of very different reasons. I loved *WALL-E* because it was the first film I felt like I had a real hand in creating. I like my first picture book, because making picture books was a dream I have had since I was a little kid. I love my plein air work because I get to share it, and that time, with my daughters.

2da: How do you deal with a challenging project? Do you have any tips for our readers?

NK: For me there are two types of challenging projects; those that are challenging creatively,

and those that are challenging politically or interpersonally. In the case of a creatively challenging project, it is usually research that helps me find the spark I need or a new perspective with which to approach the problem. The projects that are difficult because of the people I'm working with can be really tricky to solve, although usually it comes down to a lack of communication and a lack of honesty. Do good work and be a pleasure to work with.

2da: Are there any other skills and techniques would you like to learn in the future? Are there any materials you would like to experiment with?

NK: Oh yes, I don't ever want to stop learning. I would love to get into printing more,

woodprints, monotypes that sort of thing. I would love to start painting with gouache again as well. I'm always trying to become a better writer and illustrator all around.

2da: What has your experience as a freelance artist been like? What lessons have you learned?

NK: I used to do more commercial and game freelance, but with this type of work there seemed to be a new deadline every night. With a full-time job, family and a picture book career, those kinds of deadlines ended up burning me out. While the picture books are a ton of work, the deadlines are more long term and since I'm generally not a procrastinator, I can get a book out the door, ahead of schedule, at a very ►





● A plein air capturing the morning sun



● An illustration from Noah's *Slumber* project

reasonable pace for me. Right now, my day job is at Pixar and night job is as an author and illustrator. The mornings, evenings and weekends reserved for the family works out perfectly.

2da: What does a working day in your life look like?

NK: In our family we have a really strong rhythm every day. Most days (including weekends) I wake up between 6:00 and 6:30 am. I'm the breakfast maker during the week; my wife takes on the lunches. I bike to work so I get to Pixar around 8:20 am and then I work until about 6:00 pm. We have dinner when I get home and then I do the baths and stories and put the kids to bed. After the kids are in bed and the chores are done I head to our studio to start picture book work at 8:30 pm until I can no longer stay awake, which is around 11:00 pm these days.

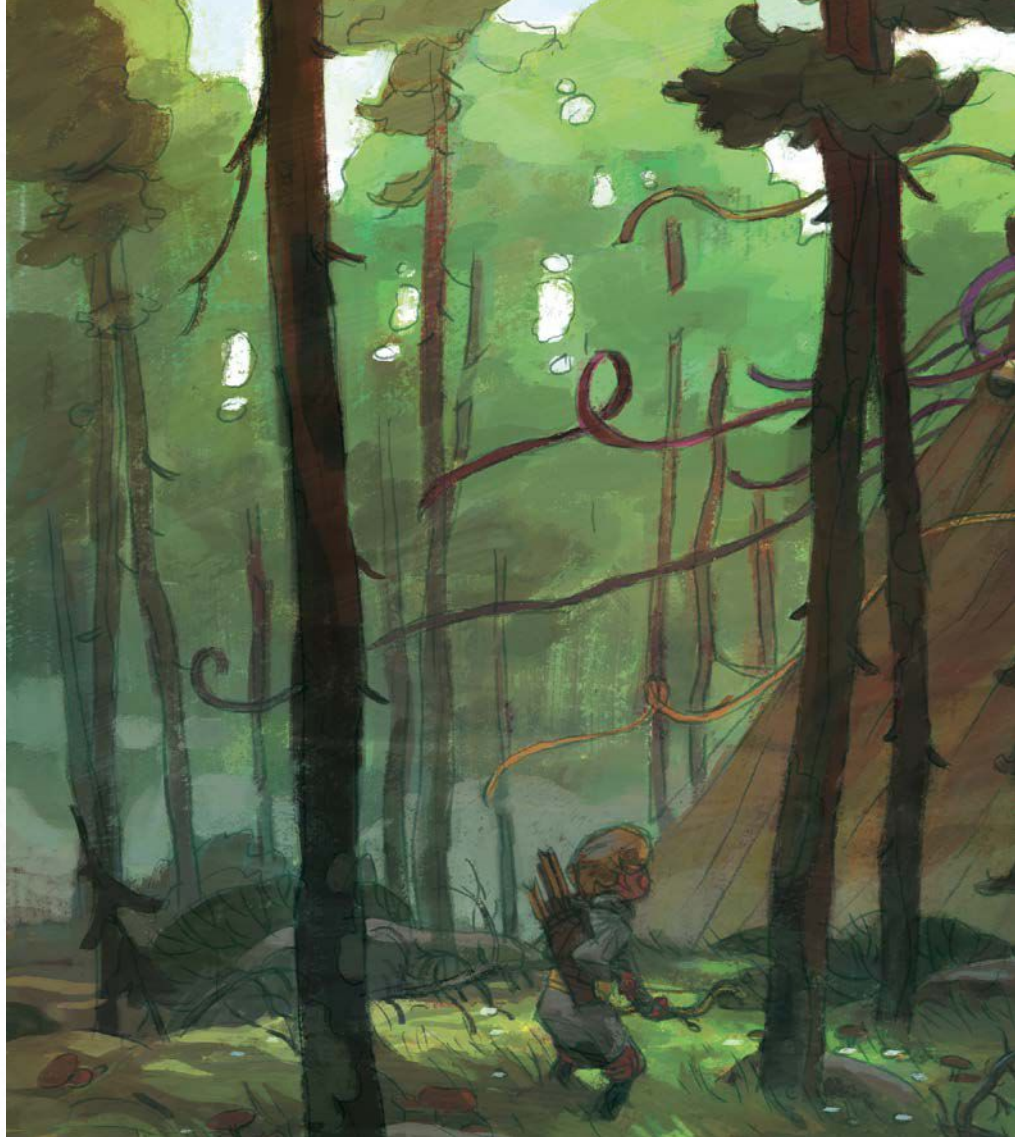
2da: How do you like to spend your time when you aren't creating beautiful art?

NK: I like working around the house, woodworking, hiking, and gardening. I'm a big homebody for sure.

2da: And finally, what can we look forward to from you next?

NK: My second picture book, *Great Big Things* (Illustrator) will be out in 2017 and my third *Slumber* (Author, Illustrator) in 2018. I also just finished up art direction on *Cars 3* and have begun work on a new project that will come out down the road. ●

Thank you Noah for taking the time to speak to 2dartist today!



● An illustration of an encounter with a mythical dragon



● An illustration from *Yuri and the Golden Plum* featuring boar forest spirits



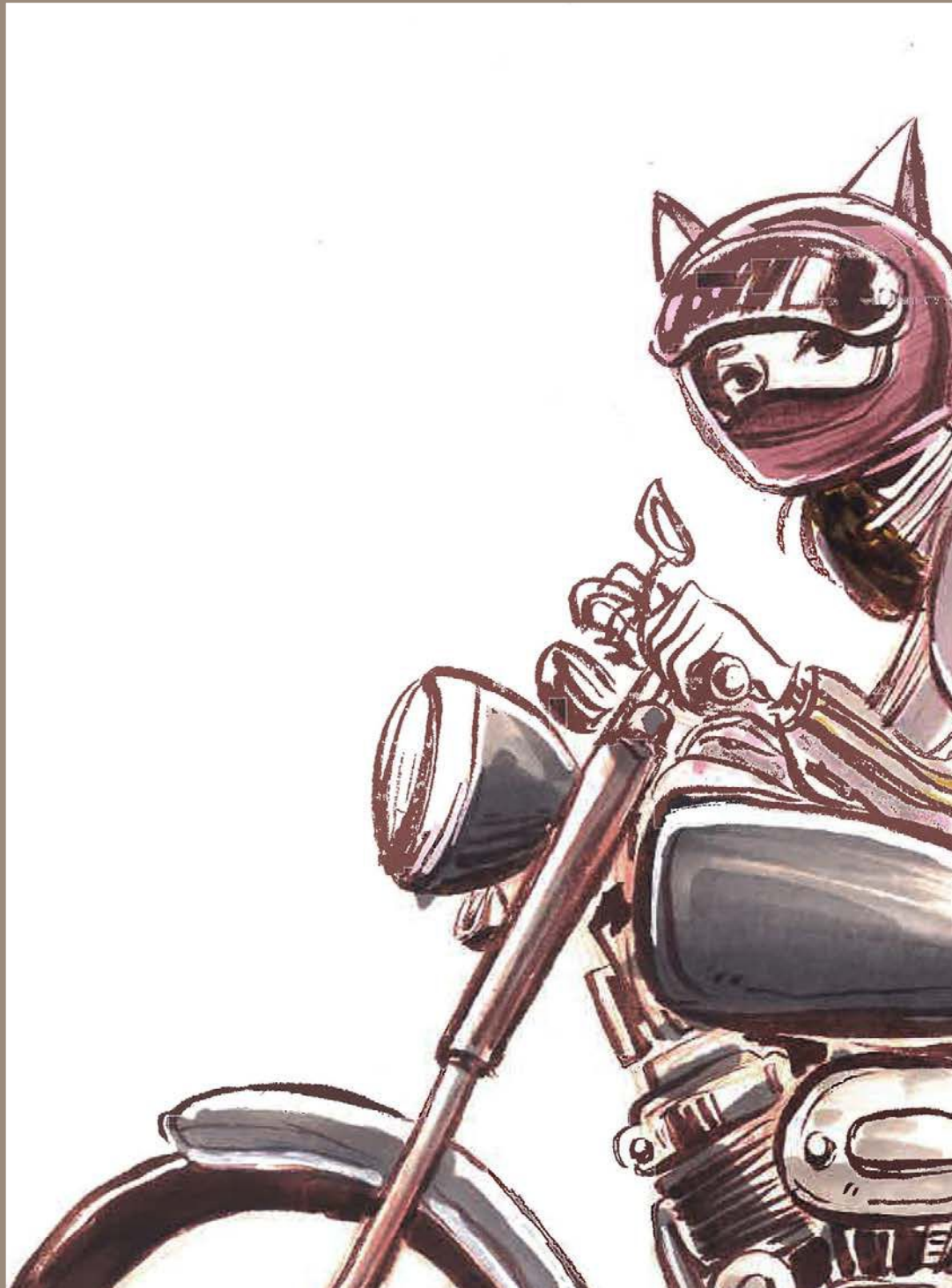
The Artist



Rachel Ho (Rachelhofs)

behance.net/rachelhofs

Rachel Ho is a visual development artist and illustrator from Sabah, Malaysia. She works for an animation studio in Kuala Lumpur, and also freelances and works on personal projects.



Sketchbook of Rachel Ho: Generating expressive sketches

Illustrator and visual development artist Rachel Ho shares tips on generating new ideas, adding personality to an image and creating flow in sketches ▶

All images © Rachelhofs





ches

Rachel explains why sketching is important to her process and how to develop emotion in your drawings...

I have always liked scribbling ever since I was a kid. I only started taking art seriously after I went to art college, and that was also the time I realized I wanted to pursue a career as an artist. Who encouraged me with my art? I would say my mom is the one who somewhat encouraged me by allowing me to watch Disney cartoons and movies. But the very first thing that really inspired me to start drawing was watching *The Powerpuff Girls*.

I like keeping old sketchbooks because I get to see how much I have progressed and grown as an artist (and also have a good laugh at my old drawings). Looking back, by far the most thrilling and exciting experience of my career so far has been getting to meet Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen in person and present my drawings to them.

To me, sketching is useful because it helps develop drawing skills, and it is also useful for work as sketching gives you freedom to scrawl out rough ideas, or even get to places that you could have never imagined. Most importantly it saves time. Usually I watch short films or movies to keep myself motivated, or go out with a bunch of artist friends to do live drawing and art sharing.

“Sometimes I do not have a clue whether a particular idea could work or not, I just follow my gut instinct”

Inspiration and ideas:

My inspiration usually comes from watching films and animation. I like to look behind the scenes of a pre-production film or movie because I get to see how a production is developed and progressed from the beginning to the end. One of the reasons that I like watching behind the scenes footage is because I get to see how and where professional artists extract their raw ideas from.

My all-time favorite artists are Kevin Dart, Gop Gap, Slawek Fedorcuk and Eastwood Wong. I love how they use the simplest shapes to replicate their drawings; the colors they use are really tasteful, too! I also usually fuel myself ►



● *Goldfish Kanto*. A Japanese boy balances a bunch of goldfish lanterns (kanto means lantern) on his forehead. It was really fun for Rachel to draw expressions on the goldfish lanterns



PRO TIP

Go for it!

Be bold and go for it! This is one of the key points to becoming a successful artist. Never be afraid to make mistakes as this is part of learning and growing as an artist. We have times we feel unsafe, but staying in comfort zones won't take you far. All you need is just that one tiny step outside the ordinary to make a move.

- *Koinobori* also known as *Carp Streamer*. This piece was drawn traditionally with color markers and a pigmented brush pen



- Having run out of ideas for Inktober, Rachel was watching videos of a sculptor creating clay dolls, and thought it might be a fun idea to draw

by browsing through ArtStation and Pinterest when I'm not working; this is the time when ideas kick in. Sometimes I do not have a clue whether a particular idea could work or not, I just follow my gut instinct and hope for the best. Sometimes the idea that we think may not work turns out to be a surprising success, meanwhile, having an idea with a good feeling might end up the other way round.

Materials:

My usual pens are: the Pilot pigmented brown brush pen, Pilot hard-nib brown brush pen, Koi water-based brush pen, Copic markers, a Faber-Castell red colored pencil, and Uni-ball's Signo white gel pen. Brush pens have always been my favorite to draw with because they are flexible to use and it is easy to control the thickness of the brushstroke. I'm quite picky when it comes to choosing sketch pens; they must have a nice "flow" while I am drawing and be able to create a dry brush effect. I tried using ball pens and fine Artline pens but they do not seem to have the flow that I'm looking for, maybe because I personally like to finish one drawing without changing pen nibs.

By far my favorite sketchbook is from Moleskine, they have the finest quality in terms of texture and thickness of paper and most importantly there is less bleed-through compared to normal sketchbooks. They are quite pricey for sketchbooks, but it is definitely worth the money.

When I'm feeling adventurous I go all the way down town to buy different brands and materials, simply to test them and experiment. Each pen gives a whole new feeling, and I am really hoping I can try to paint-sketch with oil paints in the future. ►

● One of the traditional drawings Rachel did for Inktober 2016



“Be slick and confident with your own brush or pencil strokes”

Sketching techniques:

The technique I apply the most is making use of the pen's stroke from thick to thin, as it creates depth in your art. Eventually the weight of your lines will determine how the audience reacts to your drawing because it tells different stories just by the stroke thickness itself. Generally it makes a drawing more lively and interesting to visualize. I also like to sketch using shape languages because it is fun, and it adds more personality to my drawing.

One tiny tip for sketching is not to draw repeatedly on the same spot because it will spoil the original flow and texture of the sketch. Be slick and confident with your own brush or pencil strokes. Angling a pen is also important: find an angle that you are comfortable with and able to produce various line thicknesses with. Exploring different pens or materials will help you find your “go-to” pen, or even help develop a new feeling to your drawings.

Becoming a successful artist does not require formal art instruction in my opinion. I have a few artist friends who studied in non-art fields, but they are more skillful than people who studied art. In the end passion wins out. The essential aspect of being successful is to be determined in what you are doing, dare to try out new things, and to do more practice or experimentation.

- Cultural fashion is one of Rachel's favorite things to draw. She is always fascinated by the colors and details of each culture





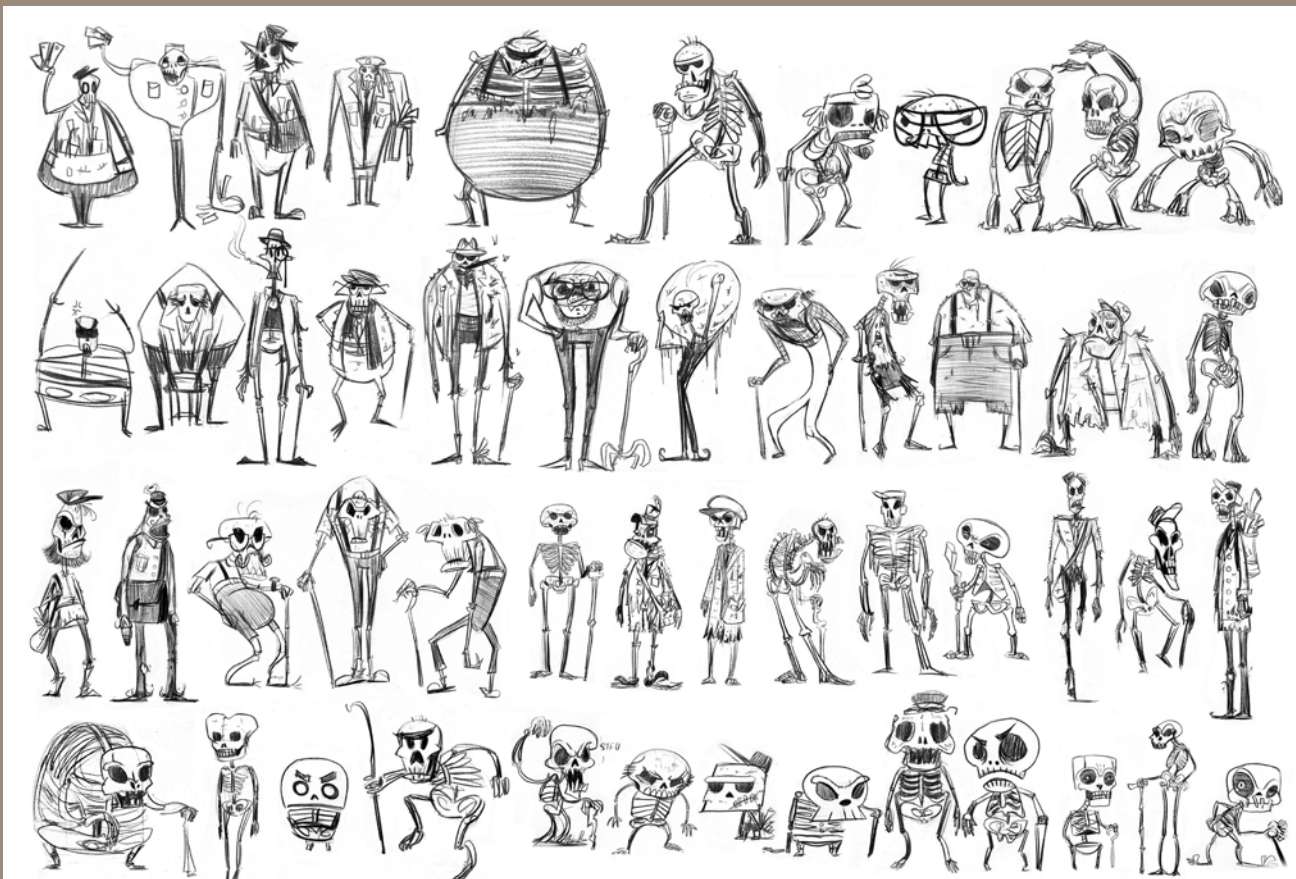
- An old mansion design for an animation short film Rachel was involved in. The style setting was Victorian era, and the concept was inspired by a bird cage

⚡ RACHEL'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

Sketch exploration

This was the sketch that I had a breakthrough with in my drawings and realized that I love doing visual development for cartoon animation. Back when I was in college, my lecturers used to ask students to follow a certain realistic style. I suffered quite a bit back then to be honest but it did strengthen my foundation skills.

As I was preparing to graduate I did not have a clue what I wanted as an artist. Luckily in my final year I was involved in a group project, and my task was to do an animation short. I did not know I could do so much until I had that group project, and that was also the first time I felt genuinely happy doing a college assignment.



⚡ PRO TIP

Shape language and distortion

Drawing with simple shapes can help portray your drawing's personality, making your drawing memorable and pop out. As for distortion, it gives a strong impact to the audience and people will instantly recognize your drawing. When applying distortions on your drawings, make sure it is clear, simple and exaggerated.

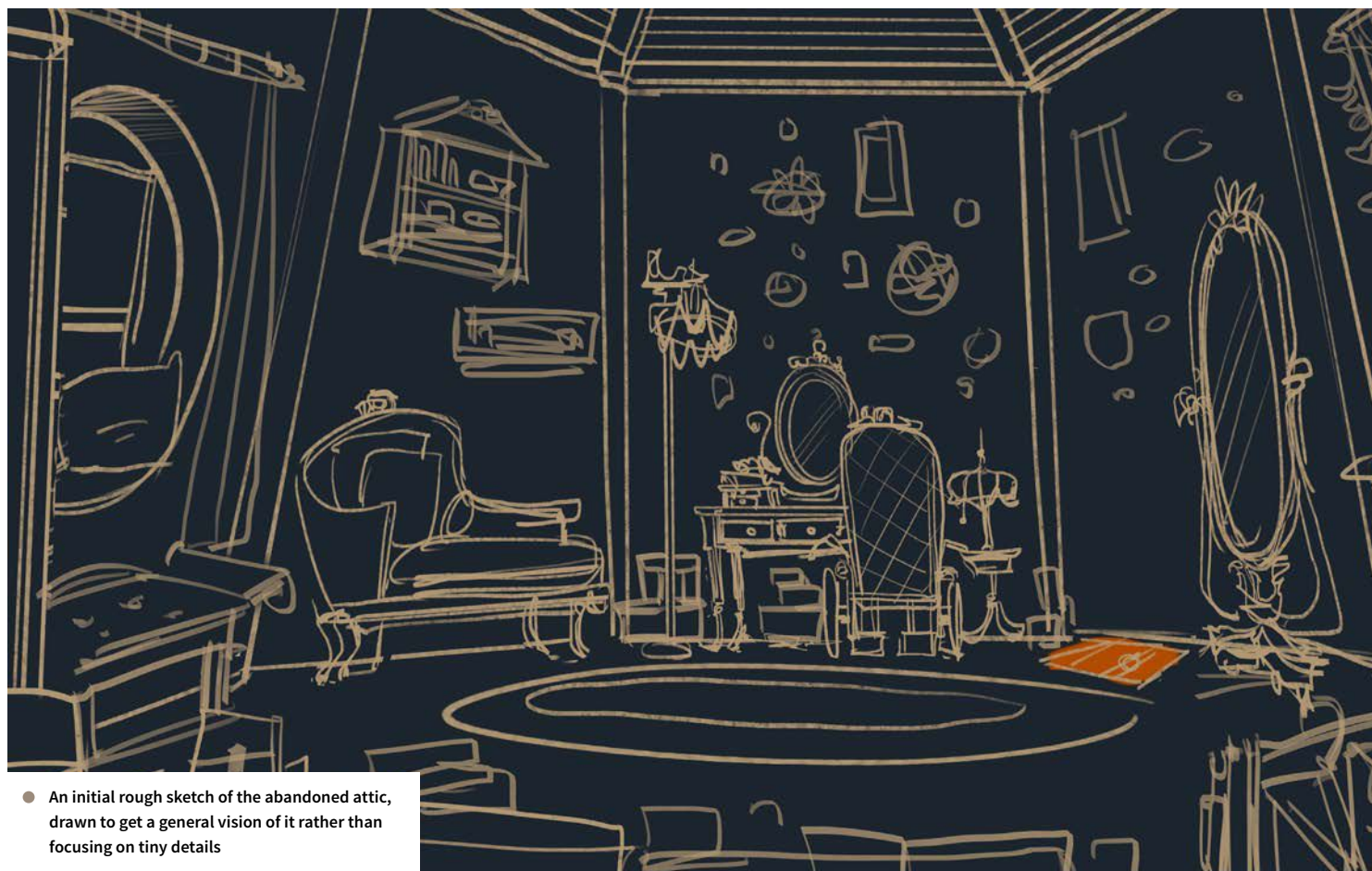
- This piece was an escape from work, initially intended to stay as a loose line sketch, but it ended up with flat colors and slight cleaned-up lines



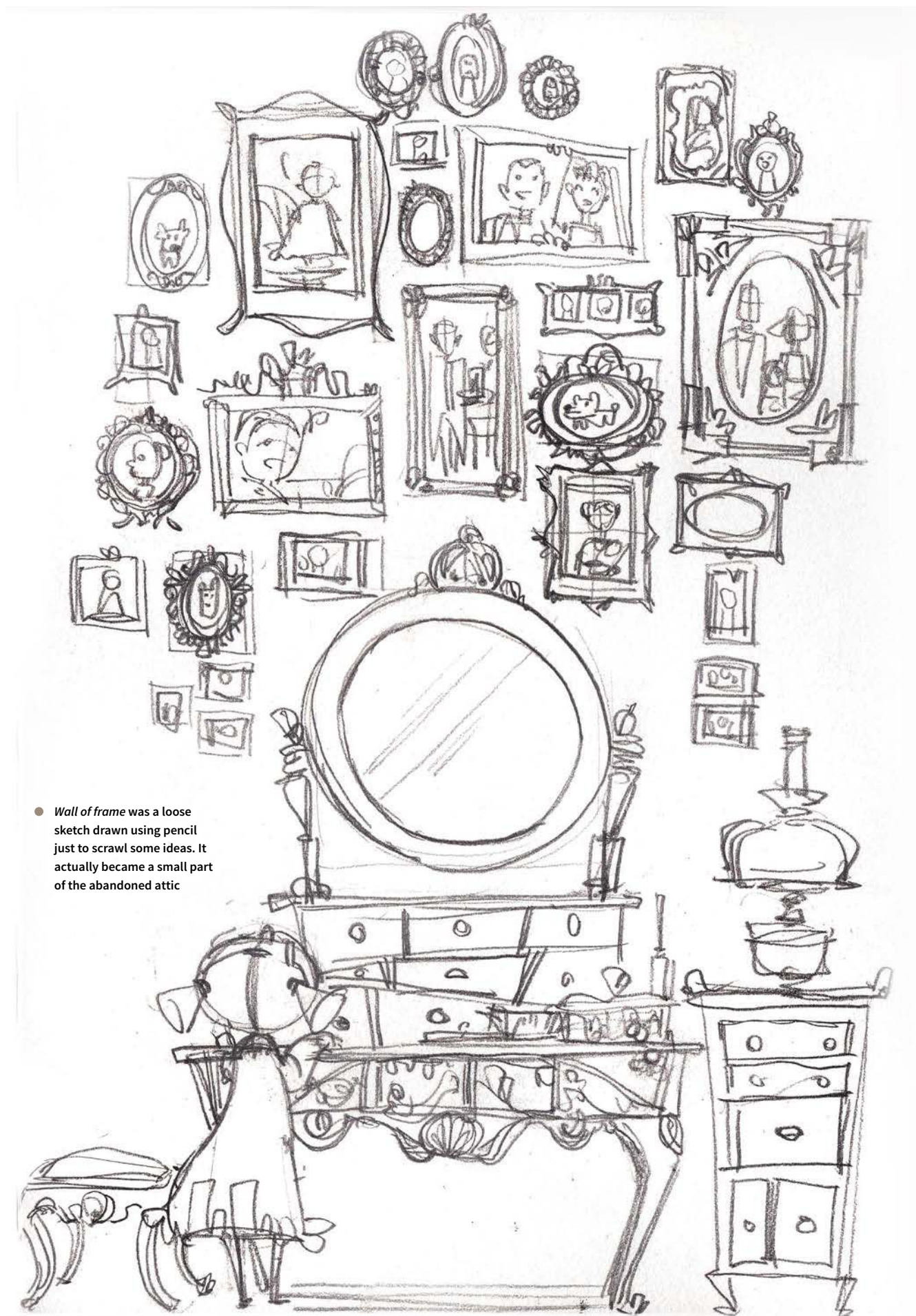




- An abandoned attic sketch for a collaborative short film. The design was based on an octagon shape, with vintage Victorian style furniture



- An initial rough sketch of the abandoned attic, drawn to get a general vision of it rather than focusing on tiny details



- *Wall of frame was a loose sketch drawn using pencil just to scrawl some ideas. It actually became a small part of the abandoned attic*



- This piece was drawn using a brush pen and color markers. The original character design belongs to Rachel's artist friend, Tan-star Putinut Karchai. She redrew his character and interpreted it with her own style

(character concept credit)
Tan-star Purinut Karchai



- Peru is famous for their alpacas; therefore Rachel drew a Peruvian girl with traditional clothes, kissing a reluctant alpaca



- Rachel uses color to sketch directly when she is bored of black and white. Sometimes she also likes to make abstract-looking characters focusing on shape

Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists and their artwork to adorn the pages of our magazine. If you think you have what it takes, get in touch!

To submit, simply email Annie at annie@3dtotal.com with a selection of your images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a little information about you.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



Submit your images! Simply email annie@3dtotal.com



Call Of Sea

Satoshi Ueda

Year created: 2016

Web: akatuki.biz

© Satoshi Ueda





Baroque

Anna Lakisova

Year created: 2016

Web: anna-lakisova.com

© Anna Lakisova





Project Ashes: Ergo

Ihor Pasternak

Year created: 2017

Web: ihorpasternak.carbonmade.com

© Ihor Pasternak



Old submarine

Dmitry Kolomeets

Year created: 2017

Web: artstation.com/artist/dimk

© Dmitry Kolomeets 2017







Aurora campfire

Hjalmar Wåhlin

Year created: 2016

Web: hjalmarwahlin.com

© Hjalmar Wåhlin





La Serre

Romain Jouandeau

Year created: 2017

Web: romain-jouandeau.com

© Romain Jouandeau





New Year's Eve

Tony Skeor

Year created: 2016

Web: artstation.com/artist/skeor

© Tony Skeor





Cowboy

Javier Burgos

Year created: 2016

Web: artstation.com/artist/javas

© Javier Burgos







F**d Up!**

Juan David Muñoz Rico

Year created: 2017

Web: [artstation.com/artist/juandamr](https://www.artstation.com/artist/juandamr)

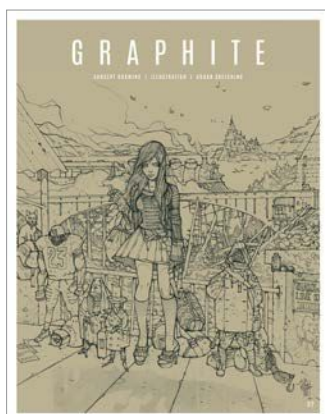
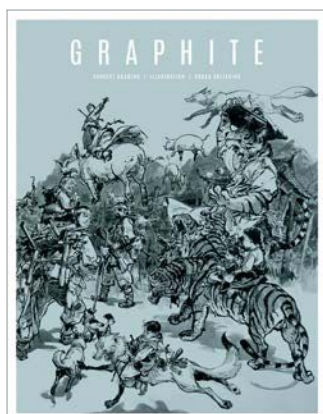
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GRAPHITE

GRAPHITE is a quarterly publication featuring inspirational artwork, interviews, and tutorials on drawing, sketching, and illustration. Each issue features content by an eclectic mix of industry professionals and talented newcomers, including illustrators, urban sketchers, concept designers, and comic artists. GRAPHITE's focus on traditional media, elegant presentation, and in-depth resources makes it a timelessly valuable addition to any art lover's shelf.

graphitemag.com

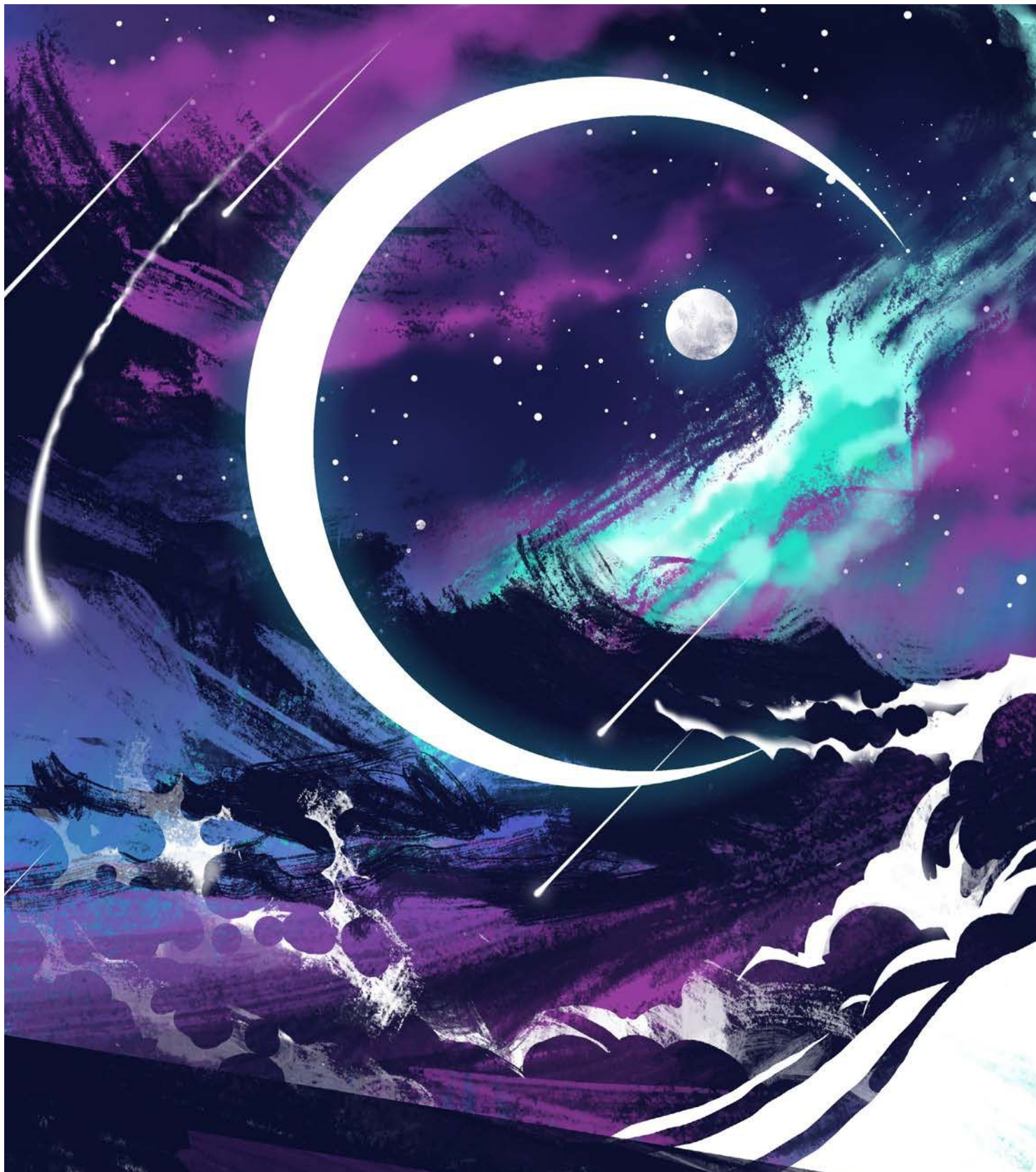


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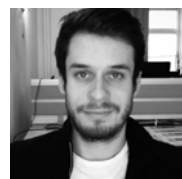


Speed painting magic effects: light

Illustrator and artist Peter Goethe shows you how to use composition and movement to drive the narrative of your paintings ▶



The Artist



Peter Goethe

petergoethe.tumblr.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Peter Goethe is a freelance artist and illustrator living and working in Hamburg, Germany. He loves to create speed paintings and share his illustrations and artworks.

Discover how to speed paint light magic effects...

In this tutorial we will create a speed painting of a wizard riding a horse and using his magic to turn the sky from day to night. Before you start creating your painting it is important to think about composition, the main focal point, and how you will lead the viewer around the page. Another important thing to consider is if you are going to follow the convention that viewers read paintings from left to right. For this painting we will follow this western style of viewing because many people read art going from left to right, moving down the canvas; therefore, if you want to add movement to your work you should lead the eye from top left to bottom right. Once you have decided on your composition, you can begin the painting.

“I find it useful to keep my references on the screen so I can easily refer to them as needed”

01 References: There are different types of digital artists; some like to use photographs or existing images to create their work, and others prefer relying solely on their imagination. I am a little bit of both: it is interesting and fun to create something new from my head but references are always a great help. You might know how you want your work to look but you aren't sure where to start – this is where you can use references. They can help work out the shapes, lighting, and color. It is also good to look at other artist's work for inspiration as they can often offer different ways of visualizing your ideas. I find it useful to keep my references on the screen so I can easily refer to them as needed.

02 Simple shapes: Starting with a new layer (Shift+Ctrl+N), select a rough textured brush and use a dark color to quickly sketch the shapes of the wizard and horse. You don't need to worry about details; simple shapes are fine for this stage. The change from day to night should look like a curtain being drawn across the sky behind the wizard. On a new layer sketch in the shape of the curtain and use the Polygon Lasso tool (P) to draw a diagonal shape for the ground. Then use a hard, dry brush to fill in the ground, but not too thoroughly as you want the texture to



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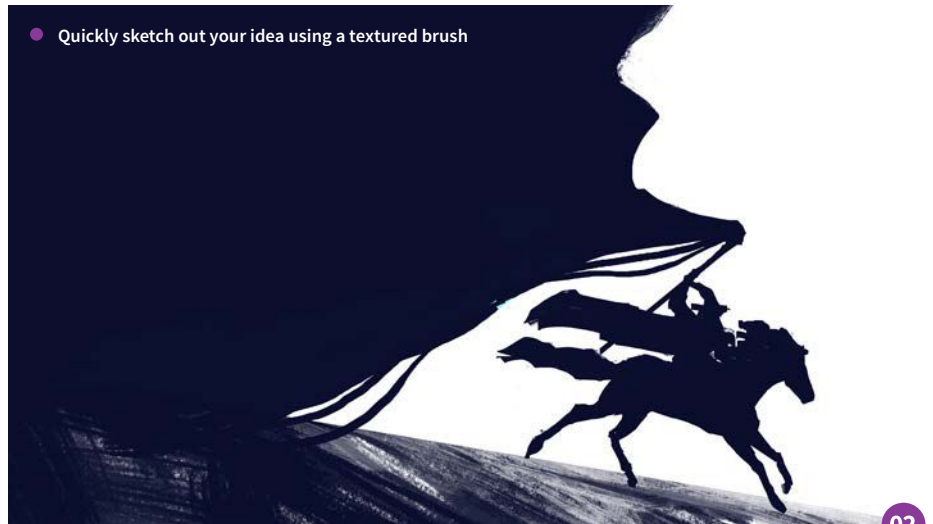
01b

show through. Adding texture in the right place can make a painting look more interesting.

03 The night sky: After finishing the main shapes it's time to add some colors to your image. On a new layer mask the night sky curtain and apply the Gradient tool (G) to create a color transition in the night sky using a dark and a bright color; try out several color variations until you find one you like. To transform a dark background into a starry night use a star field brush, you can either make your own or find a free one to download. In the Gradient Editor (click on the gradient preview bar) you can change the gradient from Solid to Noise and set the Roughness (controls the transitions between the colors: the higher the percentage the more color bands the gradient will have). By adding transparency and editing the perspective, you can use the tool to create a beautiful northern lights effect. Now you need to add some clouds using a soft round brush (or a cloud brush if you have one), making short jagged movements from left to right, and then use a thin soft brush eraser to make your soft shapes look like clouds.

04 Depth and drama: Now we want to add depth and drama to the night sky by painting in more clouds on different layers. Let's start with the brighter background clouds. On a new layer work alternatively with a dry brush and a soft brush to quickly paint in some ►

● Quickly sketch out your idea using a textured brush

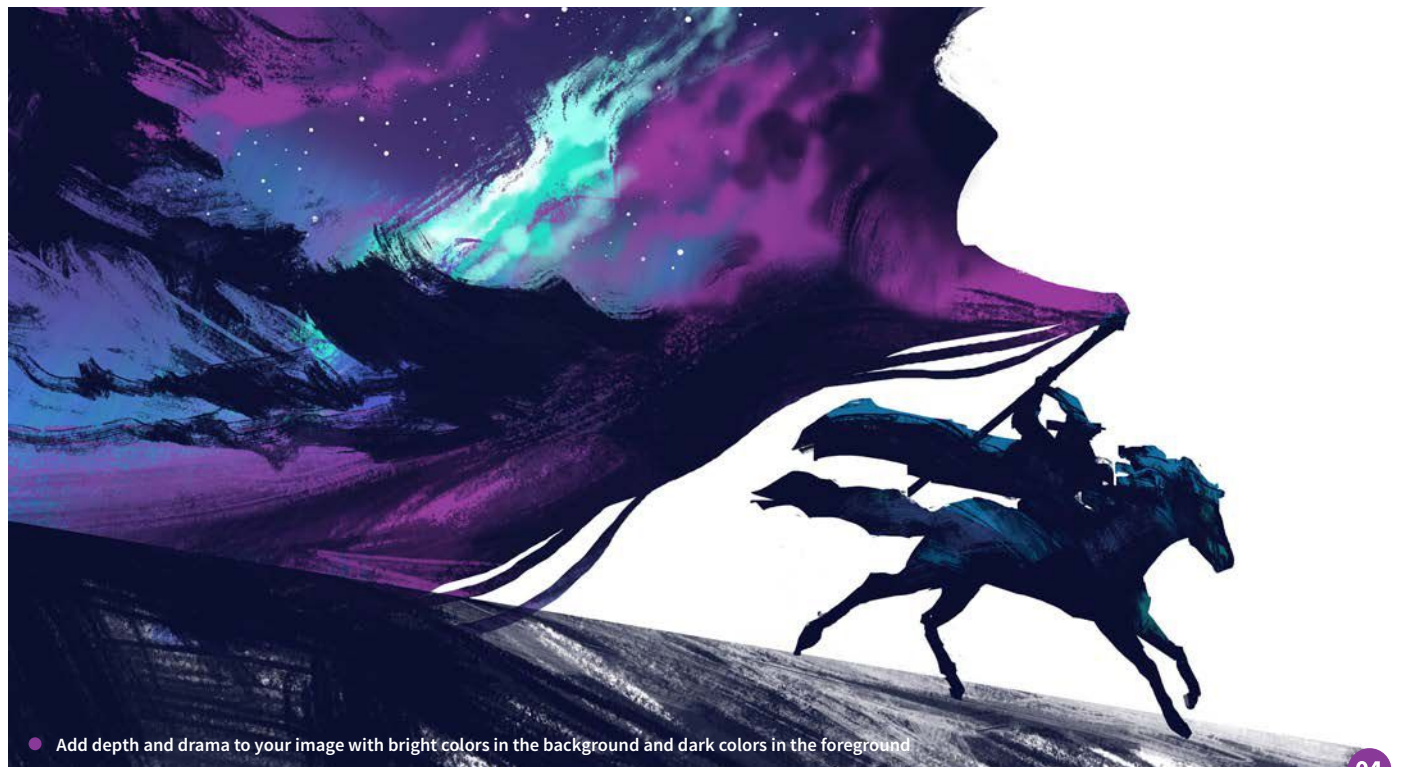


02

Use the gradient tool to create the night sky



03



● Add depth and drama to your image with bright colors in the background and dark colors in the foreground

04

light green clouds; use the dry brush to make the initial strokes and soften them with the soft brush. On a new layer paint the dark clouds in the foreground using just the dry brush, make loose diagonal movements to give the impression the wind is breaking up the clouds. The faster you paint the looser and more free your clouds will look. To give the figures of the wizard and horse a feeling of movement and life you can paint similar but smaller strokes in a bright blue.

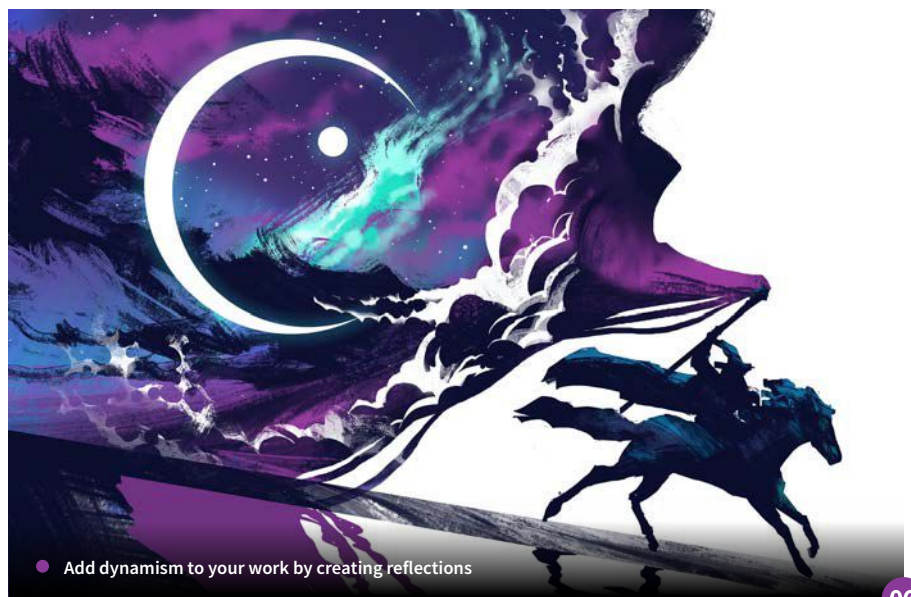
05 Lights: We do not want to leave our night sky without any bright lights, so you can add a large crescent moon and small planet in the background. Remember that the light from the moon will shine on the clouds. For the moon, create a new layer, use the Elliptical Marquee tool (M) to draw a large circle filled with white, then draw another circle inside the first to create the crescent shape, and delete the selection. Next you can make the moon shine by double clicking on the layer to bring up the layer settings, and select Outer Glow with a cold light blue. Use the same process to draw in the reflected moonlight on the clouds as the previous step.

06 Clouds and reflections: Remember to keep an eye on the clock during speed paints; the time pressure will help you to make decisions and not waste time on insignificant elements. To make the white shapes look more like clouds use the Eraser tool (E) to remove areas with circular motions; you can also use a hard round brush to make the clouds look like they are going to break away in the wind. This gives the effect of the moonlight falling through and giving form to the clouds. Create a new layer and use a hard brush to paint in a lake on the ground and the reflection of the wizard; this will make the image more dynamic and add interest.

07 The wizard details: The majority of the painting is done so you can spend some time working on the wizard and horse. The wizard is the second focal point of the painting as well as the actor in our narrative. To give the viewer the impression he is riding very fast, the horse's mane and tail, and the wizard's cloak, should all be streaming in the wind. Use the Eraser tool and a thin hard brush to cut some jagged and dynamic lines in to the cloak and tail, which brings the figure to life. The viewer should be able to recognize it is a wizard even though he is quite small. As an aid, you can



05



06

add some classic wizard accessories such as a pointy hat and a large staff. Remember to use the references to check the horse's proportions!

08 Foreground and background: At the moment the image looks a bit boring and cut out, so we can add a few details to the foreground and background to add extra depth and interest. Pick a light turquoise color and quickly add some strokes to the right "day time" side of the canvas. This not only adds interest but also emphasizes the speed

and movement of the rider. Moving on to the ground we can make the lake a bit glassier; in a new layer create a mask of the lake layer and paint on some dark strokes beneath the night curtain with a dry brush. To bring the foreground closer to the viewer you need to create some contrast. Use the same brush and color pick a lighter color (I use a light blue) and paint on the surface of the lake to give it a watery effect.

09 Falling stars: We are almost done with our painting, so let's concentrate

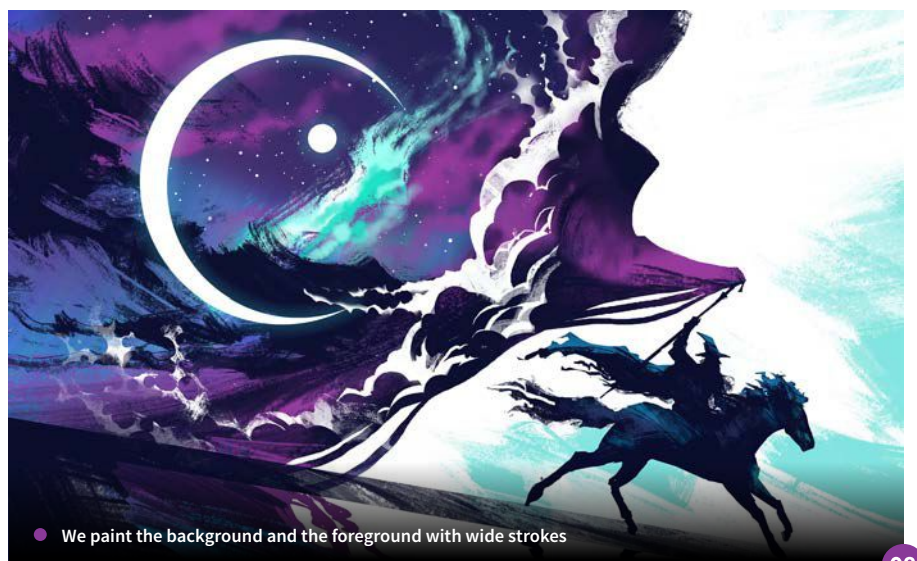
on the last few details. To add to the magical atmosphere some falling meteors will bring the painting to life. Create a new layer and use a hard round brush to draw a straight line (holding down Shift will make it much easier than doing it freehand). Use the Polygon Lasso tool to make the line thinner at the beginning, and delete the bit you don't need. Make the bottom of the line fatter using a soft round brush to make the head of the meteor; angle the line to 45 degrees and copy it a few times to give the impression of a shower of falling stars. Be sure to vary the sizes. Select one falling star and use Free Transform (Ctrl+T) to enlarge it, and then warp it (Edit > Transform > Warp) so that it curves towards the wizard. As a final touch, use a soft round brush eraser to give it a smoky look.

10 Highlights - wizard: Finally, to finish off the piece and add a touch of magic, cover the wizard and horse in golden stardust. Use a particle or stardust brush to paint on the effect. You don't need to be heavy handed with the brushstrokes, or you will lose the shape of the wizard. You can also use the stardust brush to add the effect of magic particles coming out of the wizard's staff; pick the same turquoise you used in Step 8. Paint along the edge of the night curtain with the turquoise, again being careful not to overdo the brushstrokes. To give the effect of more energy use the Eraser tool to remove the lower part and make a clean line. Perfect, now we are done! ●



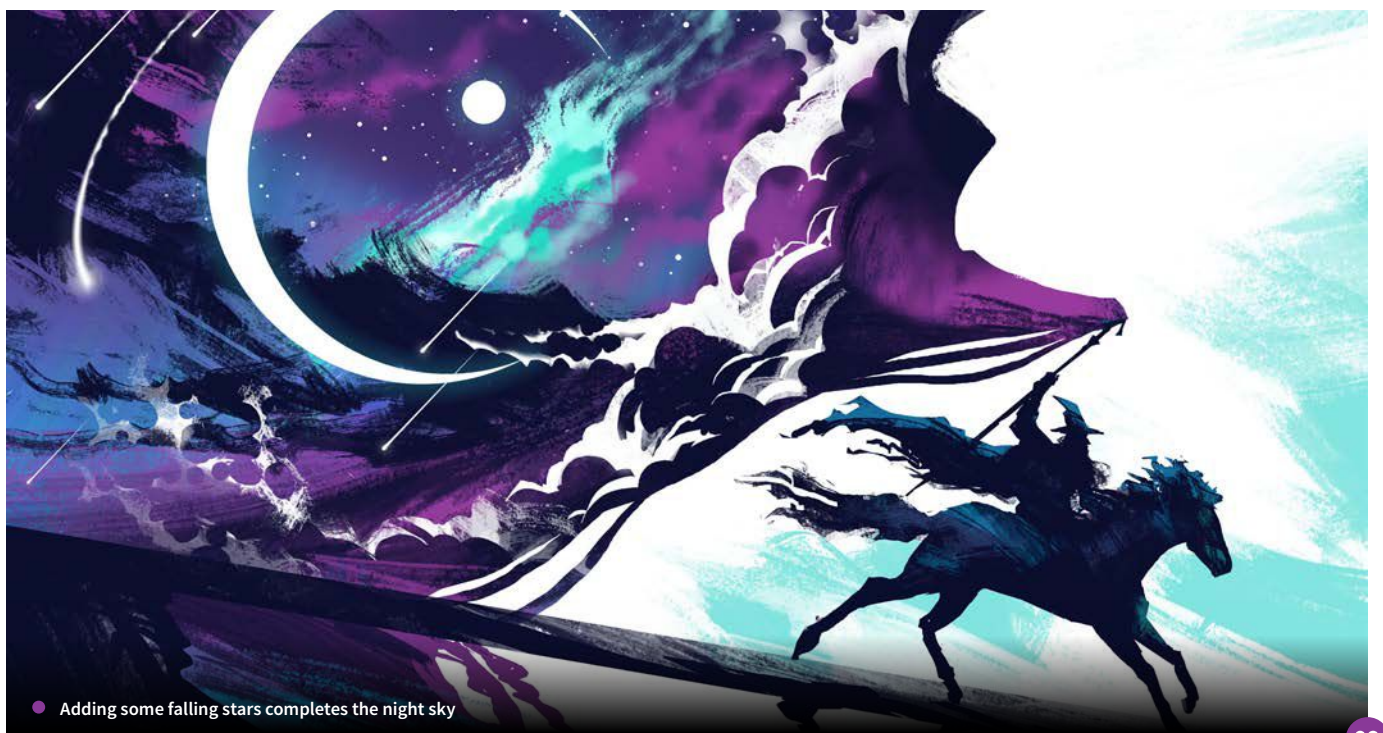
● Spend some time working on the wizard and horse

07



● We paint the background and the foreground with wide strokes

08



● Adding some falling stars completes the night sky

09



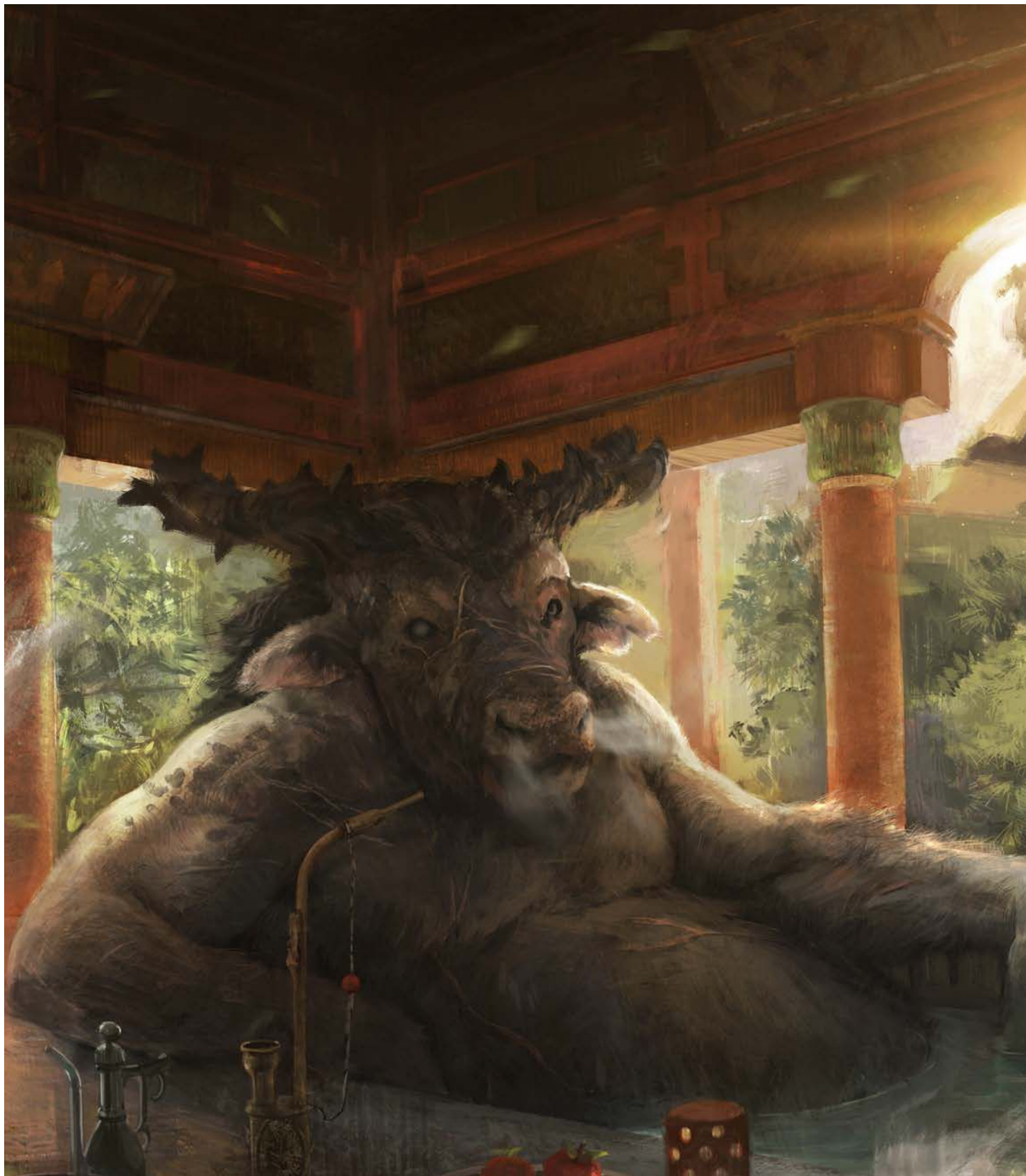


The Artist



Peter Goethe

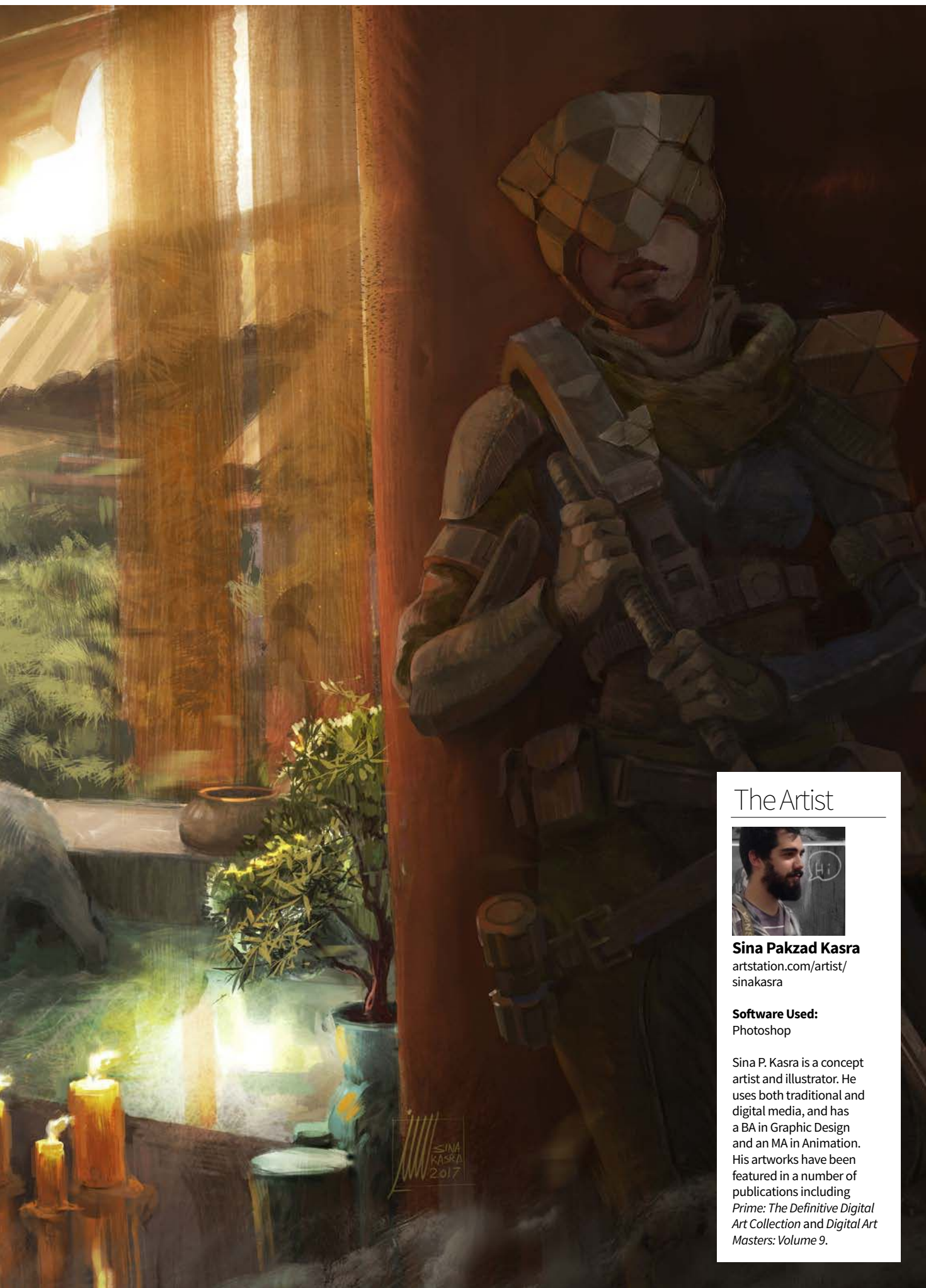
petergoethe.tumblr.com



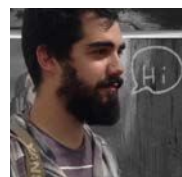
Reimagine Theseus and the Minotaur

Learn how to create a new setting for a classical Greek myth with concept artist Sina P. Kasra [▶](#)





The Artist



Sina Pakzad Kasra

artstation.com/artist/sinakasra

Software Used:
Photoshop

Sina P. Kasra is a concept artist and illustrator. He uses both traditional and digital media, and has a BA in Graphic Design and an MA in Animation. His artworks have been featured in a number of publications including *Prime: The Definitive Digital Art Collection* and *Digital Art Masters: Volume 9*.

Discover how to give a classic myth an oriental twist...

In this tutorial I will show you how to use myths and legends to create new worlds without being faithful to the original. You can be inspired by these stories to create your own themes and genres, but you should also add something of yourself in order to create something new that hasn't been seen before.

We will be looking at the story of *Theseus and the Minotaur*, however, I want to change it up a bit and change Theseus into a woman in futuristic armor. We will also change the location from Classical Greece to a place with a touch of the Far East. We will look at using different brushes to speed up the work, adding props and objects, using effects, and adding details. This tutorial will only use brushes from start to finish.

01 Preliminary design sketch:

Creating good composition is a vital part of having a good final picture; the scene and composition should act as guides, leading the viewer's eyes around the page towards the main focus.

Start this process with big simple brushes. You are looking for a suitable composition that tells the story and focuses on the characters. Try not to think about details as you want to get as much information down as you can with as few strokes as possible. You can begin to introduce your main color – I add red to the columns to set the mood of the piece. With the scene set up you can roughly develop the character's shapes and pose. This will help with checking the overall composition and backbone of your illustration.

02 Brushes:

It is very important that you think about the brushes you want to

“Accurate perspective is another important aspect of a great illustration”

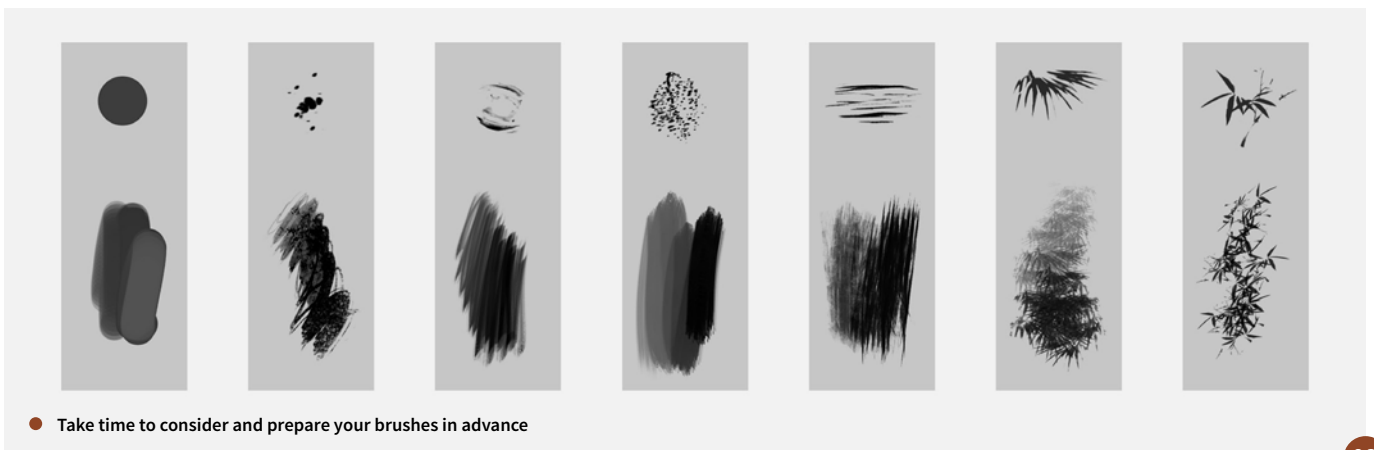
use; also what elements and atmosphere you want to create in your illustration. For example, I will paint in some foliage and bushes in the background and behind the buildings – for this I will use brushes that help me to achieve this look (see image 02 for my brush set). Before you get on with the painting I advise you to spend time finding and preparing the brushes in advance, as it will save you time in the long run. Remember the right brush setting can have a huge effect on the speed and quality of your work.

03 Accurate perspective: Accurate perspective is another important aspect of a great illustration. When you have a building or architectural structure in your work, any mistakes will be very obvious and draw the



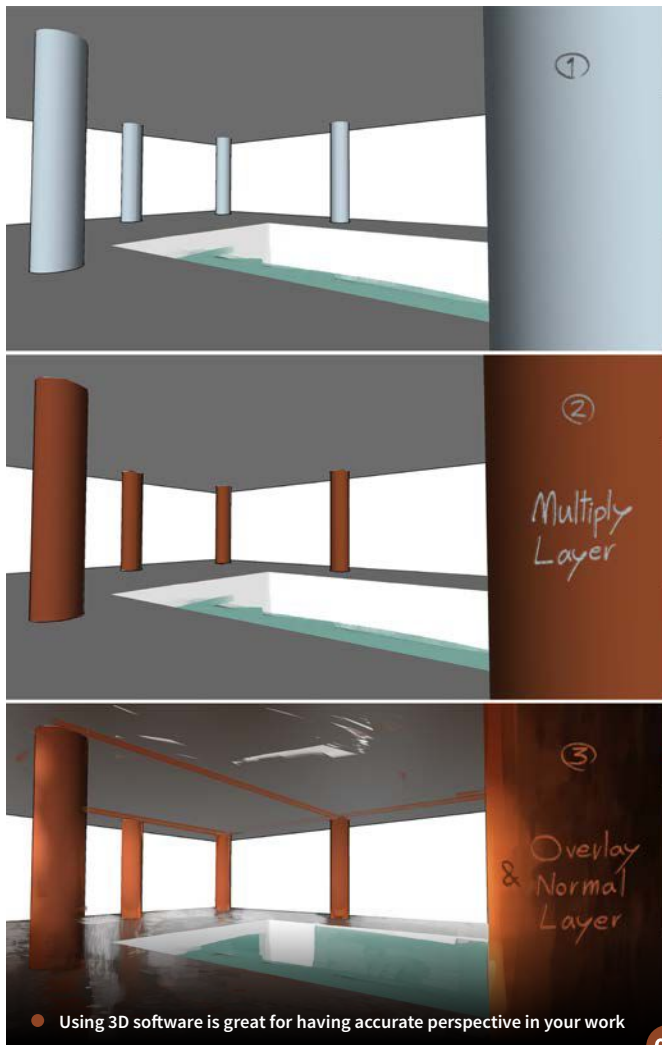
Initial character design and general composition

01



Take time to consider and prepare your brushes in advance

02



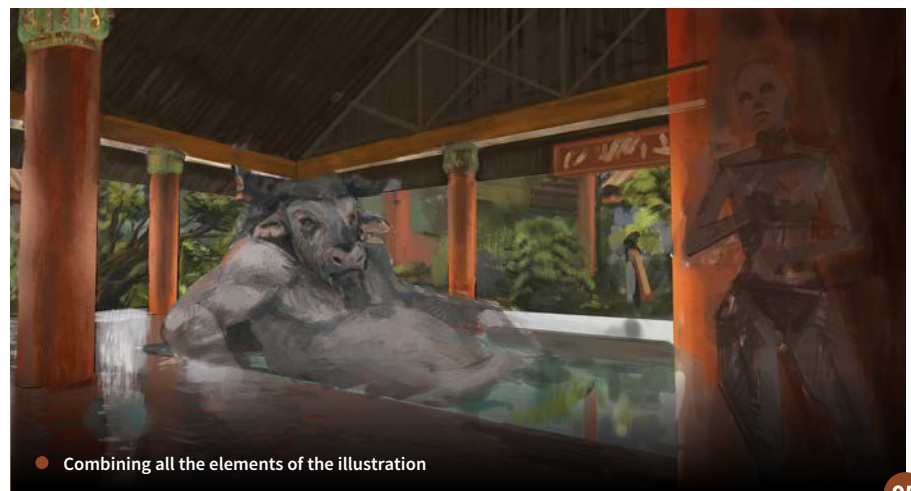
03



04

viewer's attention away from the main focus. There are several different ways to achieve accurate perspective; I will tell you about the one I prefer to use. For this illustration I use a very simple 3D base model to quickly and accurately adjust the perspective. Once I have done the initial sketch, I use SketchUp (a 3D modeling software) to create the environment using simple shapes. I save it out as a JPEG or PNG and open it up in Photoshop to paint over the top of it. If you decide to use 3D software to create buildings you should keep the dimensions from the original sketch so it fits nicely when you take it back to Photoshop.

04 The background: Sometimes the background becomes fragmented into different sections by the middle ground and foreground – in this illustration the pillars and Minotaur break up the background. In this situation I prefer to paint the whole background rather than just the visible areas. This gives a more consistent, realistic backdrop that you will have more control over.



05

To start building up the background you should begin with the general surfaces and basic colors, then move on to adding more elements and details. In order to get the best results you should paint from back to front – start with the things furthest away and work your way forward. Doing it this way will give you more control over the environment, and result in a more realistic backdrop.

05 Bringing it all together: Now it is time to bring everything together – the background, building, and all the initial character sketches. When everything is combined you should then be able to spot any potential issues, such as if an object looks out of place. If you do find any problems, then you should correct them now before you move on to adding details and effects. ►

“If you are including a character in an illustration, you must consider the clothing and props of the character”

06 Welcoming new ideas: While working on a painting you may get new ideas, don't be afraid to give them a go; I often find my paintings improve when I try out something new. For example, the Minotaur is a huge creature and therefore will need a big entrance to be able to get into the building, so you can change the structure to add a large entryway. If the Minotaur looks a bit cramped you can always increase the height of the ceiling. This will also allow you to decorate the interior of the building, adding to the atmosphere of the whole illustration.

07 Developing the female character: If you are including a character in an illustration, you must consider the clothing and props of the character – more characters equal more work! You may find it useful to work on the character separately from the main picture because you will be able to concentrate on the character and experiment with new ideas without being distracted.

Using the initial sketch try out several different variations and color palettes to find the best result. Be brave when testing out ideas or try combining ideas to find the one that fits with the overall theme of your illustration.

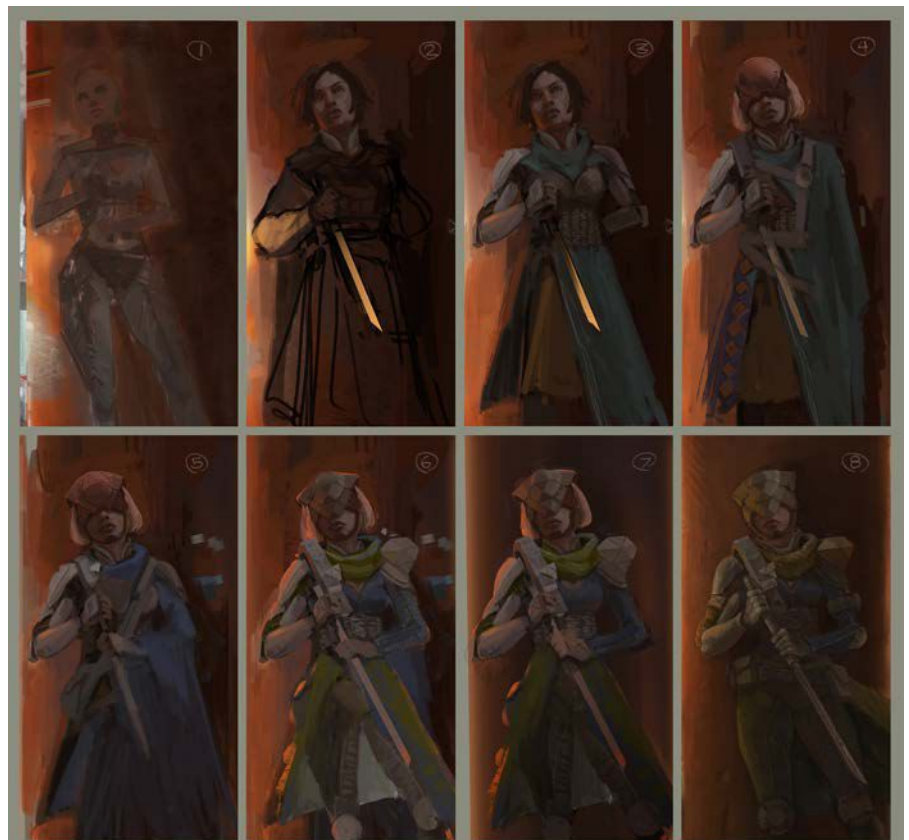
08 Adding extra details: Adding props and objects to your scene that are consistent with the setting will help the viewer to buy in to the concept. You should definitely invest some time researching and developing these details. Another thing to keep in mind is the placement of the props, as well as checking there is a clear distinction between near and far objects.

A simple way to do this is to use light values, and fewer details for things that are further away from the foreground and darker hues, and more details for those that are closer. To make your illustration more interesting, try using a variety of colors and materials on the props. You may need to separate the middle ground and background by making the background lighter, and the Minotaur (he is in the middle ground) darker with a rim light.



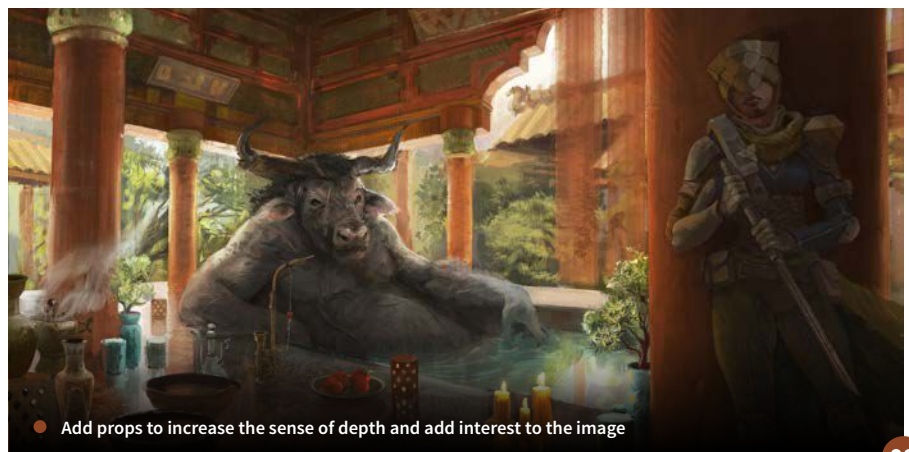
● Don't be afraid to make changes

06



● Test out different idea when developing characters

07



● Add props to increase the sense of depth and add interest to the image

08

09 **Changes and edits:** You are almost there! This is the stage for making any modifications or small edits to the image to get a better final look. You shouldn't be afraid to make last minute changes; for example, I want to make minor adjustments to the Minotaur's head and neck. To make changes I recommend making a copy of the PSD, on the new copy flatten all the layers, and use the Liquify tool (Shift+Ctrl+X) to adjust the areas you want to change. When you are happy with the changes simply add the copy version back to the original as a new layer. Liquify is a great tool for making changes quickly.

10 **Effects and final details:** At this point in the process you can add light effects, particles, or any other types of visual effects that you think will bring your picture to life. As you are almost at the end of your painting it is better to zoom in (Ctrl++) and use smaller brushes to patiently paint in the effects. When you are creating the final details always keep the light source and distance between planes in mind; you should avoid adding too much detail in your background as it could ruin your carefully crafted sense of depth and atmospheric perspective. It is good to zoom back out (Ctrl+-) once in a while too, so that you can make sure that the overall composition and look is right – it is possible to have the correct light, depth, and contrast in the beginning but quickly lose all the balance during the process. ●

⚡ PRO TIPS

The secret of black and white

A quick and simple way to check the depth of field and contrast in your work, is to check your painting in black and white; this is because it can be difficult to distinguish different shades when you are working in color. Seeing the image in black and white helps you to see the variations between the shades, as well as check the darkest and lightest areas – then you can adjust them accordingly.



● A small change can make all the difference to your image

The Artist



Sina Pakzad Kasra
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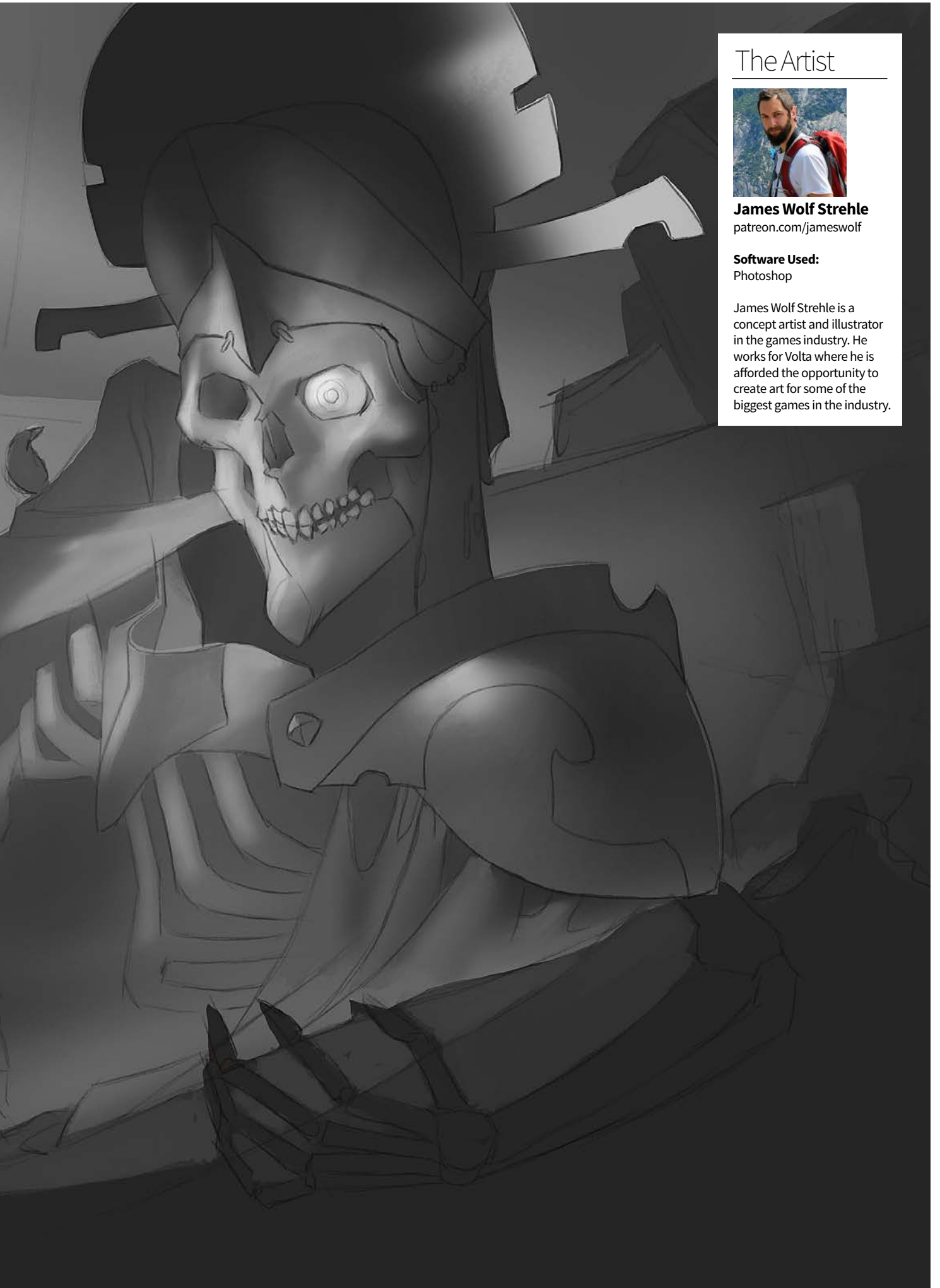






Fantasy fundamentals: composition

Part one of the new series shows you some tips and tricks for achieving solid composition in your fantasy paintings ▶



The Artist



James Wolf Strehle
patreon.com/jameswolf

Software Used:
Photoshop

James Wolf Strehle is a concept artist and illustrator in the games industry. He works for Volta where he is afforded the opportunity to create art for some of the biggest games in the industry.

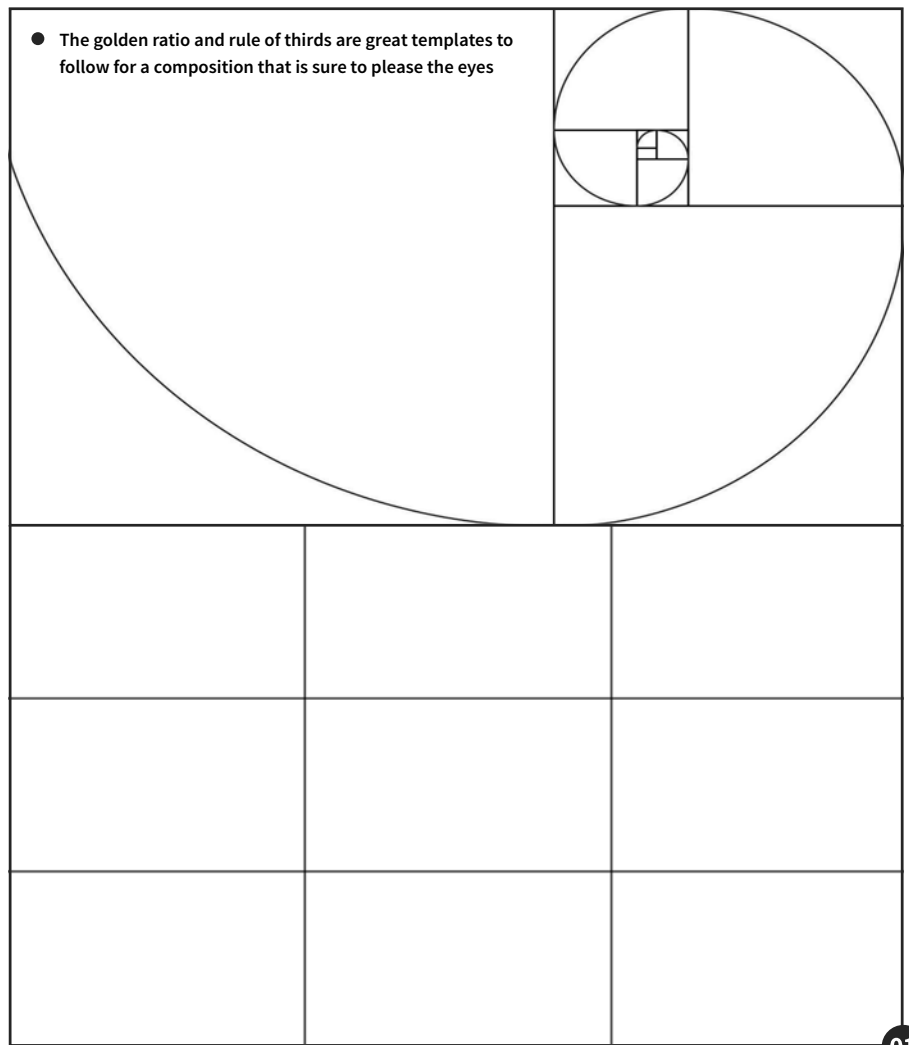
Improve your fantasy art with James Wolf Strehle...

In this five part series I will guide you through the fundamentals used to create a compelling fantasy image! We will look at crucial aspects of image creation including composition, perspective, value, visual effects, as well as a concluding segment that brings them all together. Each of these elements will be given their own article where we will be able to delve deep into why they are important and how they are applied. Becoming knowledgeable in these areas will give you the necessary tools to capture your imagination and release it to the masses in all its glory!

In part one we are going to focus on composition. If you want to get started on the right foot, this is the first step you should take. Good composition is your guiding light and without it you will be drawing aimlessly in the dark. Once the lights come back on there's a good chance you won't see the grand vision you originally set out to create. You want to give your vision the best possible chance of success, so equip yourself to ensure your work shines to its fullest. In this article I will pinpoint a few compositional practices that I use most often. For the sake of length it will not be an exhaustive list, but hopefully it will give you a good foundation on which to build on.

01 What is composition?: Composition is a set of guidelines an artist implements, arranging various elements of an image to form a coherent whole. Successful composition utilizes an array of tools to help convey the image's message and hold the viewer's eyes harmoniously. While composition isn't the sole factor in what makes an image beautiful and engrossing, it is an extremely vital part of it.

Using composition in the proper way can help you define the mood of the painting, whether it is full of action or drifting in contemplation. In the images you can see two widely used compositional layouts; the golden ratio and the rule of thirds. They are tried and tested; however, don't feel you need to cram them into every composition. You are free to break the rules from time to time when your visual message calls for it *but* be aware of why and how it will impact the end result.

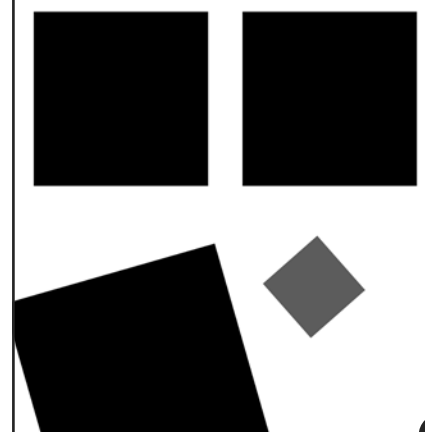


01

02 How does a good composition make a painting work?:

Your goal is to control the viewer's eye movement, directing them to each element of the painting as you layout your story for them to discover – that's where good composition comes in. Using various compositional tricks will not only keep those eyes on the page but will also make it more pleasing for them to do so. Our eyes want to be entertained but at the same time they don't want to be forced to decipher chaos either. In the example you can see the difference between bad and good compositions. In the first image you can see that it is somewhat boring leaving little for you to ponder over. In the second you get a sense of movement and interplay between the two squares. So how does this affect fantasy specifically? Well like nearly all images it is about immersing the viewers in your vision. If they are more invested in how poorly the image is composed then their ability to lose themselves in your vision is greatly compromised. Fantasy thrives on immersion and you want as little as possible getting in the way of that.

● With a little tweak you are able to transform a static composition into a dynamic one



02

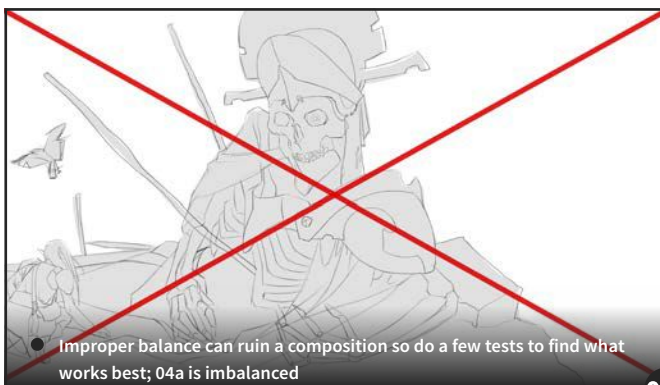
03 Rule of thirds: The rule of thirds is a method of breaking up your image into three equidistant sections both vertically and horizontally leaving you with nine boxes. Once that is done you place the important elements where the lines intersect – this achieves a more pleasing arrangement because placing subjects

off center creates an imbalance, allowing you to compare it with other elements in the image. If a subject is centered it becomes static preventing your eyes from flowing across the page. In the images you can see the difference between an image using the rule of thirds and one that does not. The first image has breathing room and allows you to focus on the connection between the figure and the bird. The second image just isn't as interesting and the focus is more on why it feels uncomfortable to look at.

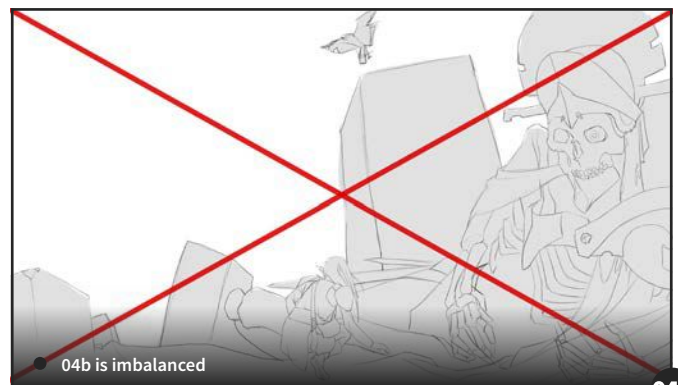
04 Balance: Another element of composition is balance. The idea behind balancing an image is that it keeps all the elements of the image in check, so the viewer's eyes are able to move around without getting stuck in one place. An unbalanced image can be uncomfortable for the viewer so you want to play with both the positive and negative space to ensure that no one area overpowers another. That doesn't mean all portions of the image have to be equal. You can have a strong focal



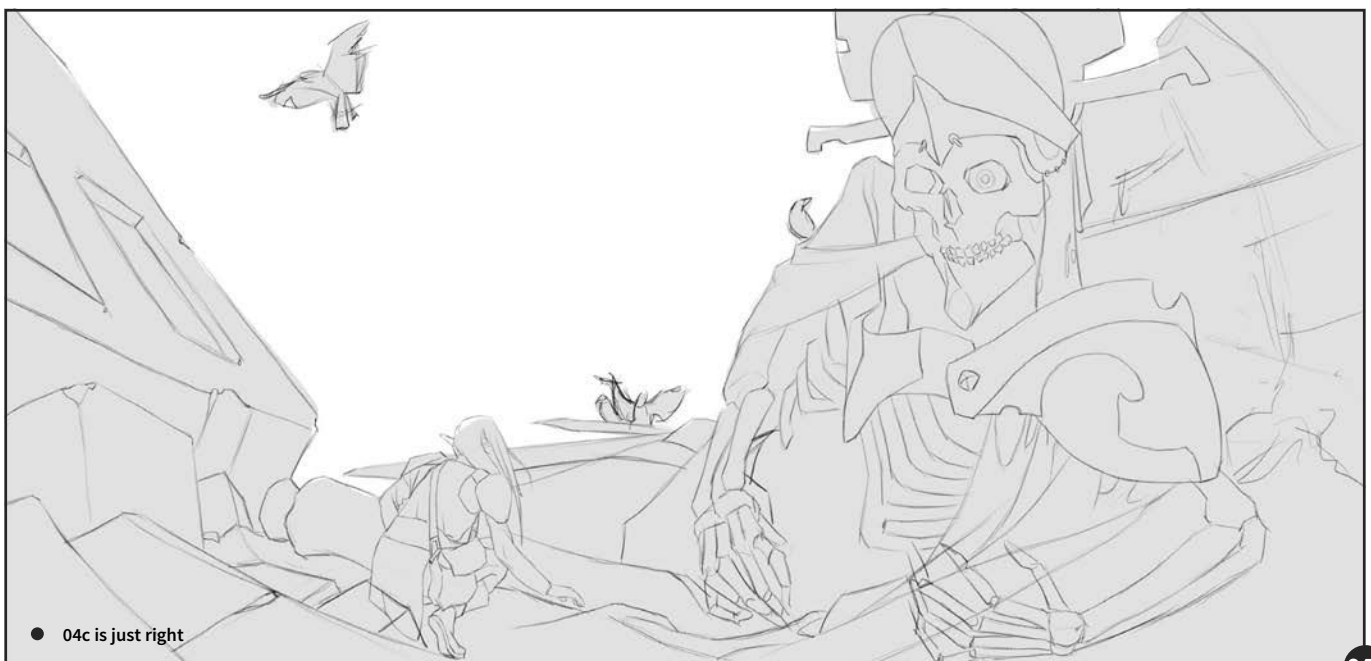
03



04a



04b



04c



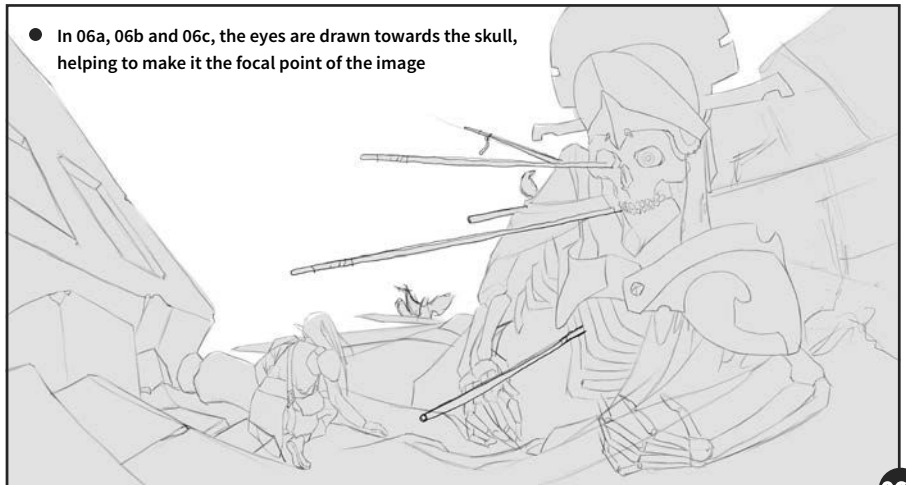
05

point; you just want to make sure its playing nice with everything else! Often, balance can simply come down to feeling right. Come up with a few thumbnails until you find something that works.

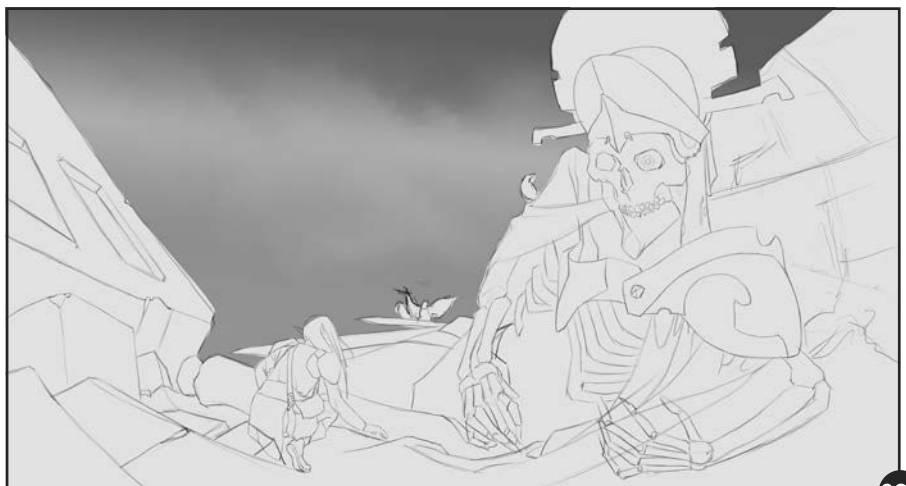
“The triangle is an effective compositional tool because it has the ability to bring stability or instability to a scene”

05 The triangle: The triangle is an effective compositional tool because it has the ability to bring stability or instability to a scene. A layout with the triangle firmly planted on the ground gives a sense of unwavering power; a composition with an upside down triangle on the other hand adds tension and drama. When you are designing your layout be mindful of what feeling you want to project to your audience. In the image, is the giant flaunting his unyielding strength, or teetering on the edge of collapse? The triangle also helps to give a sense of completeness. Without the triangle it can make the viewer feel uneasy and unsure as to where their eyes should move to. I like to give viewers three points of interest to focus on, this subtly imbues the painting with a triangle without being overly obvious about it. This allows me to

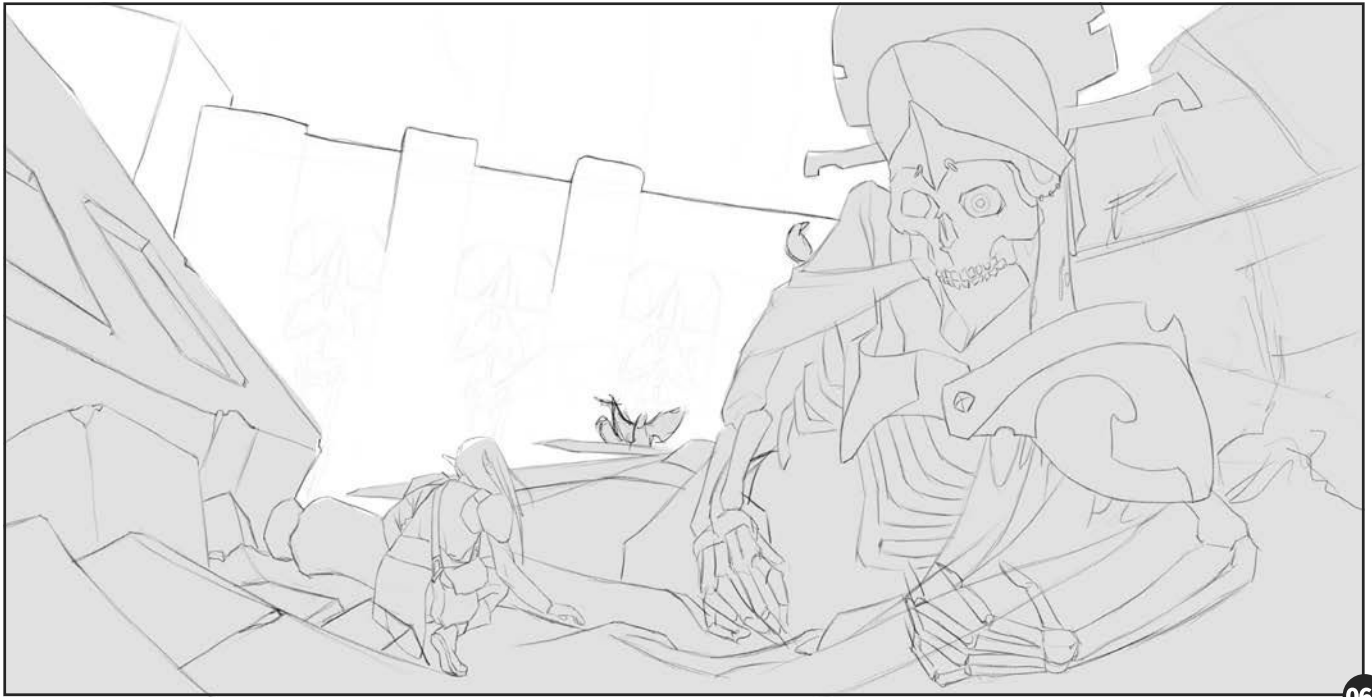
● In 06a, 06b and 06c, the eyes are drawn towards the skull, helping to make it the focal point of the image



06a



06b

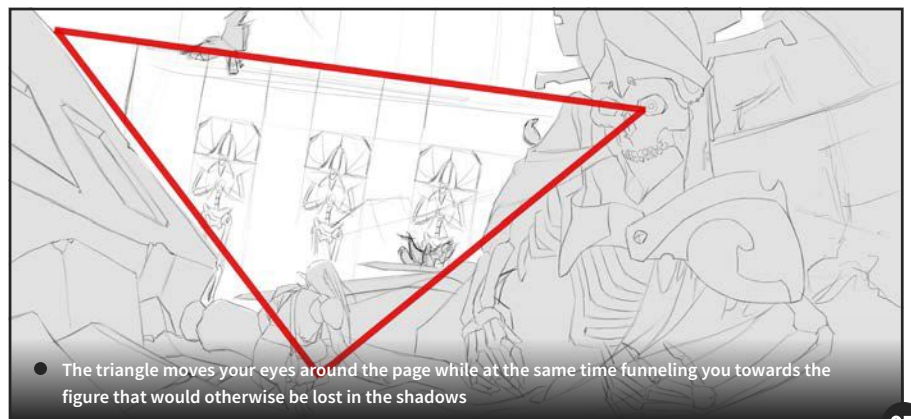


06c

place points of interest and create the type of triangle that suits the mood I am aiming for.

06 Using lines: Lines are a strong way to quickly move the viewer to a specific point in the painting. The eyes are lazy and naturally want to find the easiest way through a scene which is why lines work so well. You must be careful though because an improperly placed line can easily ruin your composition. I like to reserve them for the more critical aspects, for example, the focal point of a hero's gaze, or the direction that the action is heading. Also keep in mind that a "line" doesn't have to be literal as long as it is implied, it can be a change in value for example. Remember you want to keep your viewers engaged in the painting, not off of it!

07 Taking the viewer on a tour: You want to give the viewer a route to travel through your painting. In this way you can tell a story by simply arranging the composition in a specific manner. This is especially important with fantasy scenes because you want to immerse the viewer in the world you are trying to create. In the image you can see that I've used a triangular path to direct the eyes across the page, making the viewer aware of the focal point – the protagonist – and the space they are in. The path you create will largely depend on the subject matter. For example with an action piece you don't necessarily want the viewer to mosey through but would rather smack them in the face with the action at hand. Be mindful of this ►



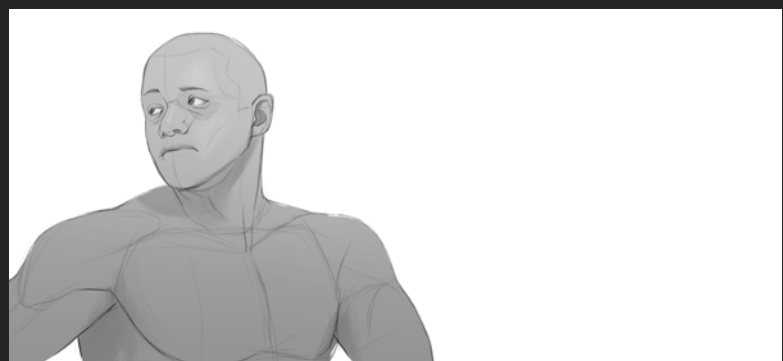
- The triangle moves your eyes around the page while at the same time funneling you towards the figure that would otherwise be lost in the shadows

07

⚡ PRO TIPS

Subject's gaze

Using a subject's gaze within a painting can be an effective method for directing the viewer's attention. We are naturally drawn to faces and eyes because that is one way we communicate with each other. You can use this fact to draw attention to something of importance within the scene or simply use it to lead the eyes much like the "line" does as mentioned in Step 6. A successful gaze will continue the journey around the page. Be wary though as a misdirected gaze may end that journey.



⚡ PRO TIPS

Flipping the page

Your eyes have a strange way of getting used to mistakes; the longer you look at them the harder they are to distinguish. Flipping the canvas is a great way to get a fresh look; you may even find that the composition works better this way. Most of us read left to right and as a result we are naturally drawn towards the bottom right of an image. If that portion of the page seems heavy try flipping it. You might be surprised at how much more balanced the composition feels. I generally flip my paintings multiple times throughout the process to ensure there is no funny business going on.



because you don't want to hinder your concept by designing a composition that works against it.

08 Value: Laying down values can result in significant changes to a composition. Adding a bright spot or deepening a shadow has an enormous impact on dynamics and interactions within a piece. Using dark and light values is a great way to highlight an area of interest. Take the sample image for example, by having a ray of light hitting the skeleton I have immediately brought it to your attention. If I had kept it in shadow, it wouldn't have the impact that it does now and your eyes may have taken a completely different path around the image. Just like the balancing of spatial relationships between objects, you also want to make sure your values are balanced as well. Make an area too bright or too dark and it will dominate an excessive amount of your viewer's attention. Midtones can also be used to your advantage, harnessing the subtleties of a group of similar values can



provide a space for onlookers to take a break while simultaneously leading them onwards.

09 Tailoring composition to accentuate fantasy: The goal of a fantasy painting is to bring the viewer into the world, allowing them to escape reality, if only for a few moments. Although the rules still apply to all visual

compositions, there are some things that can be embellished to favor a fantasy scene. Scale and odd camera angles are just two examples that you can use to your benefit. This is because the viewer is more willing to accept exaggerations when it comes to fictional spaces. Upping the scale is a good way to add dramatic and interesting interactions between subjects, a



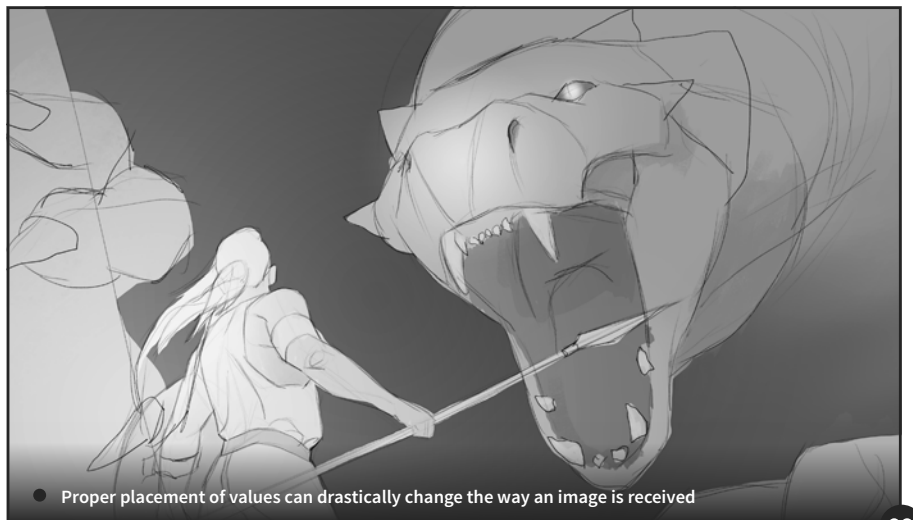
08b

conflict between a hero and a dragon for example can be enhanced by introducing dramatic scale. Giving the viewer a powerful point of view is also a good match for fantasy because it emphasizes the emotions within the scene. Fantasy is often a simplification of our own world so finding a suitably primal view point is a perfect fit.

10 Bring it all together: Using a variety of compositional tools I've finally come to a design that works for me. The main points of interest are accentuated and easy to find by way of the triangle, lines, and values.

My eyes are able to travel through the piece without sliding off the page because of a proper balance and implementation of the golden ratio. Most importantly though, I am able to direct my attention towards the story being told instead of how the image was composed.

Learning how to set up a good composition may seem daunting at first, but with a little practice it will become natural as you develop an eye for it. The principles I've mentioned throughout this article exist as a guide, but you are in no way obligated to cram them all into each and every piece. Composition is largely an exploration on how to best present your visual message, so have fun with it. If something doesn't work out try another composition and see if that works any better for you. Thanks for reading and stay tuned for part two! ●



● Proper placement of values can drastically change the way an image is received

09

⚡ PRO TIPS

The anchor

Sometimes when an image feels imbalanced or heavy the best thing to do is add an anchor – this will pull the viewer back to the page. An anchor can take the shape of a new point of interest or in a lesser form such as a break in a line that stops the viewer from looking too far off the image. The scene was feeling a bit heavy so to pull it up I added in a bird to help bring it back into balance.





The Artist



James Wolf Strehle
patreon.com/jameswolf



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The Artist



Morten Solgaard Pedersen

mortensolgaard.artstation.com

Software Used:

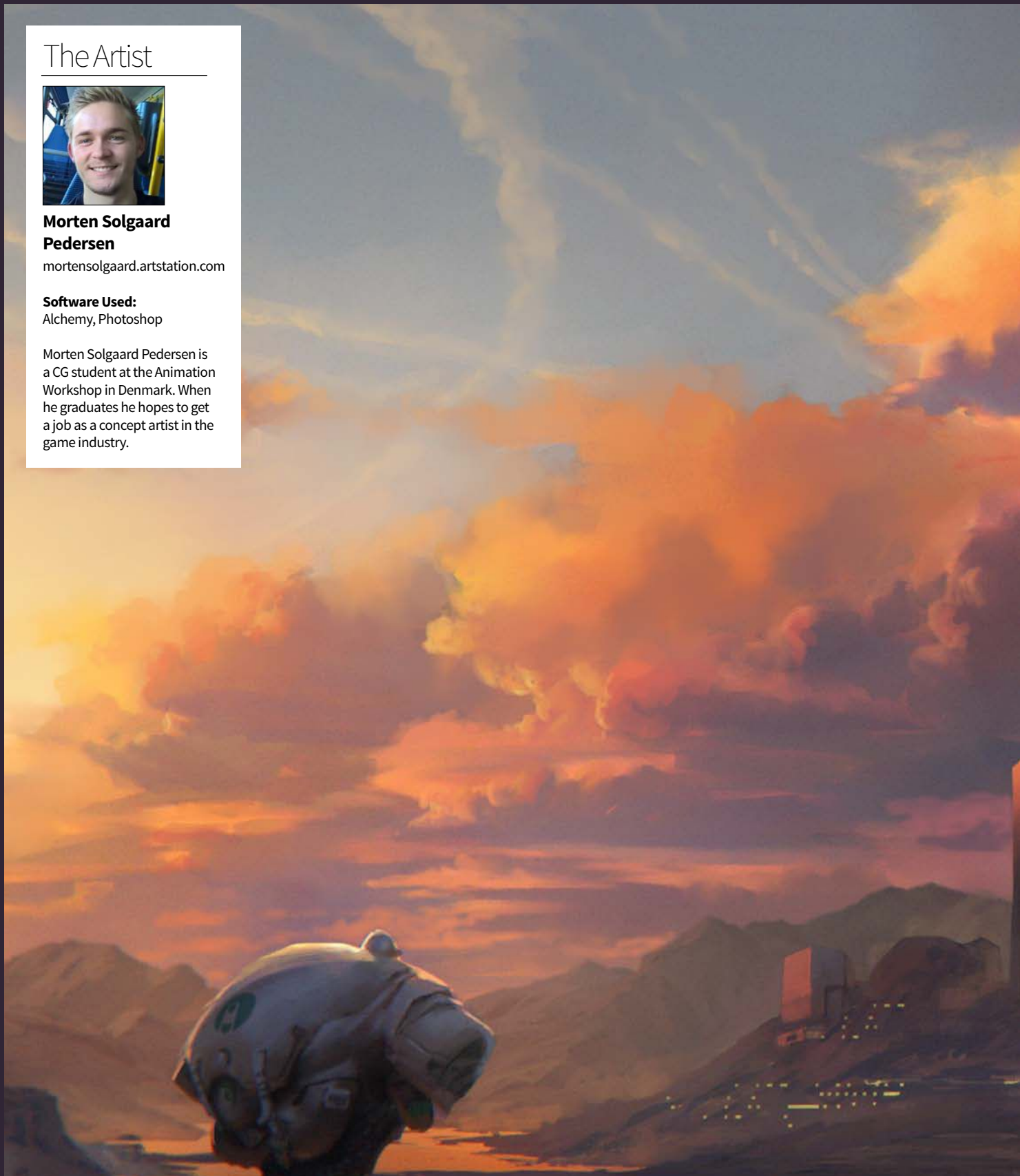
Alchemy, Photoshop

Morten Solgaard Pedersen is a CG student at the Animation Workshop in Denmark. When he graduates he hopes to get a job as a concept artist in the game industry.

Painting an atmospheric sci-fi scene

CG student Morten Solgaard Pedersen takes you through his process for constructing an atmospheric sci-fi painting ▶

All images © Morten Solgaard Pedersen





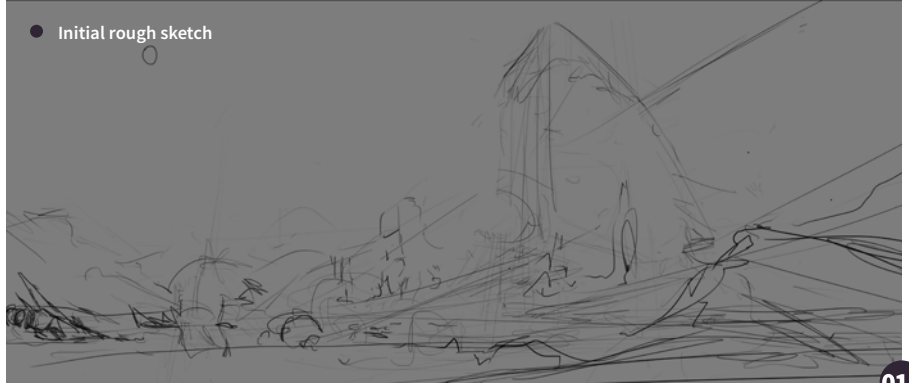
Find out how to color match textures...

In this making of I will talk about my process – from initial thumbnail to fully rendered final image. Some of these steps are crucial and something that I will always do, others are specific to this painting; no painting is approached in the exact same way. I will go through the most important parts of the process and focus on the most useful techniques, including matching the colors and values of a photo to my work, and how to design a painting like this. I will do my best to explain my decisions and thought processes; in my experience tools and techniques can only take you so far, you need to know theory as well.

01 Thumbnail and color: The first and probably most crucial part of creating any piece is exploration and thumbnailing. My idea for this piece was to convey a feeling of arriving at an unfamiliar place in the early morning. With that in mind I drew several quick sketches focusing on the composition

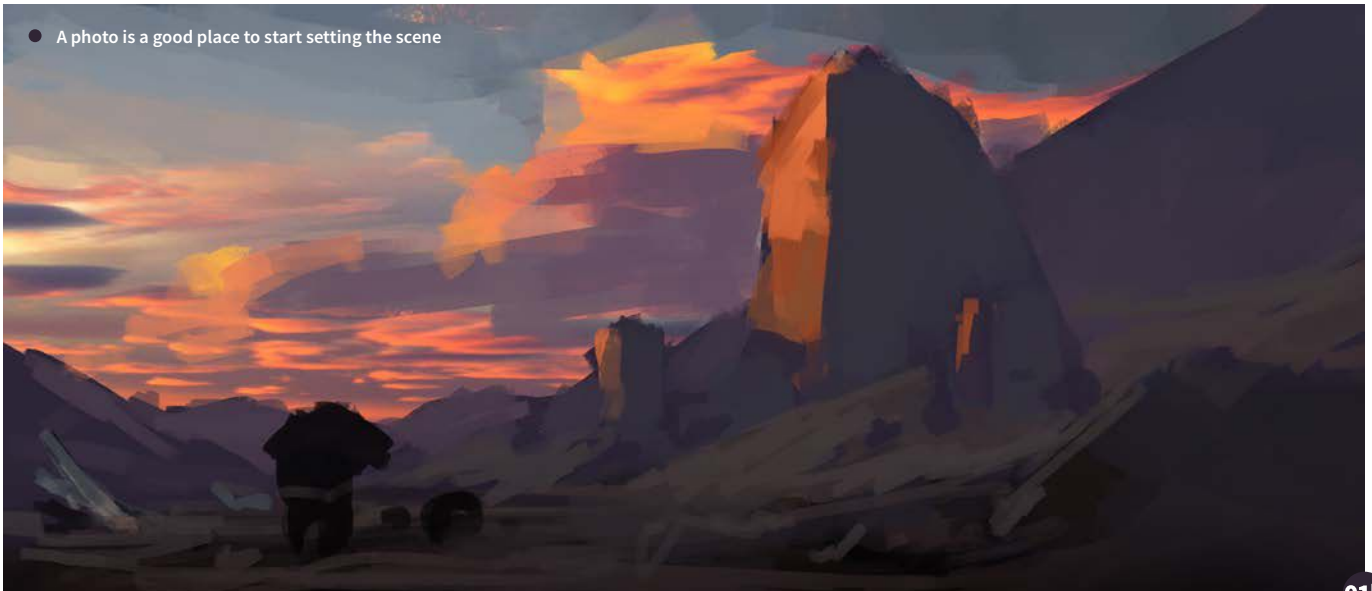
rather than working on the building and character designs; getting the values, mood, and colors right according to my concept is more important. Basically if it will affect the final image I wanted to get it figured out now rather than at a later stage, there is no point moving forward with something that doesn't work.

● Initial rough sketch



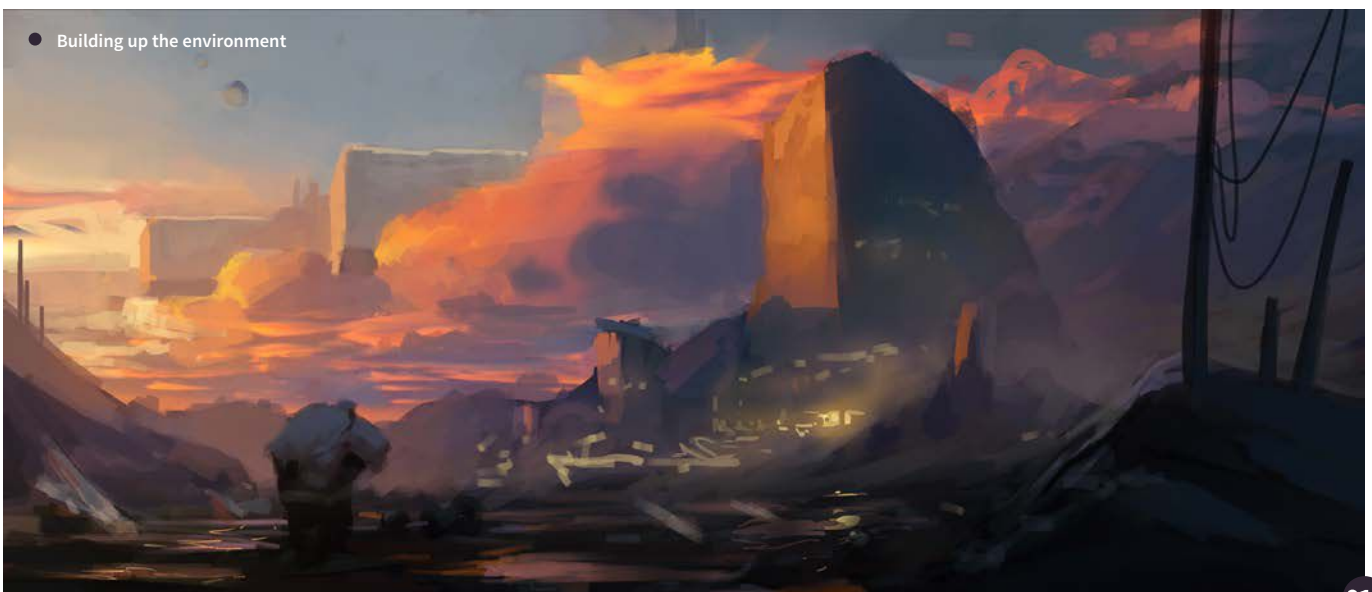
01a

● A photo is a good place to start setting the scene



01b

● Building up the environment

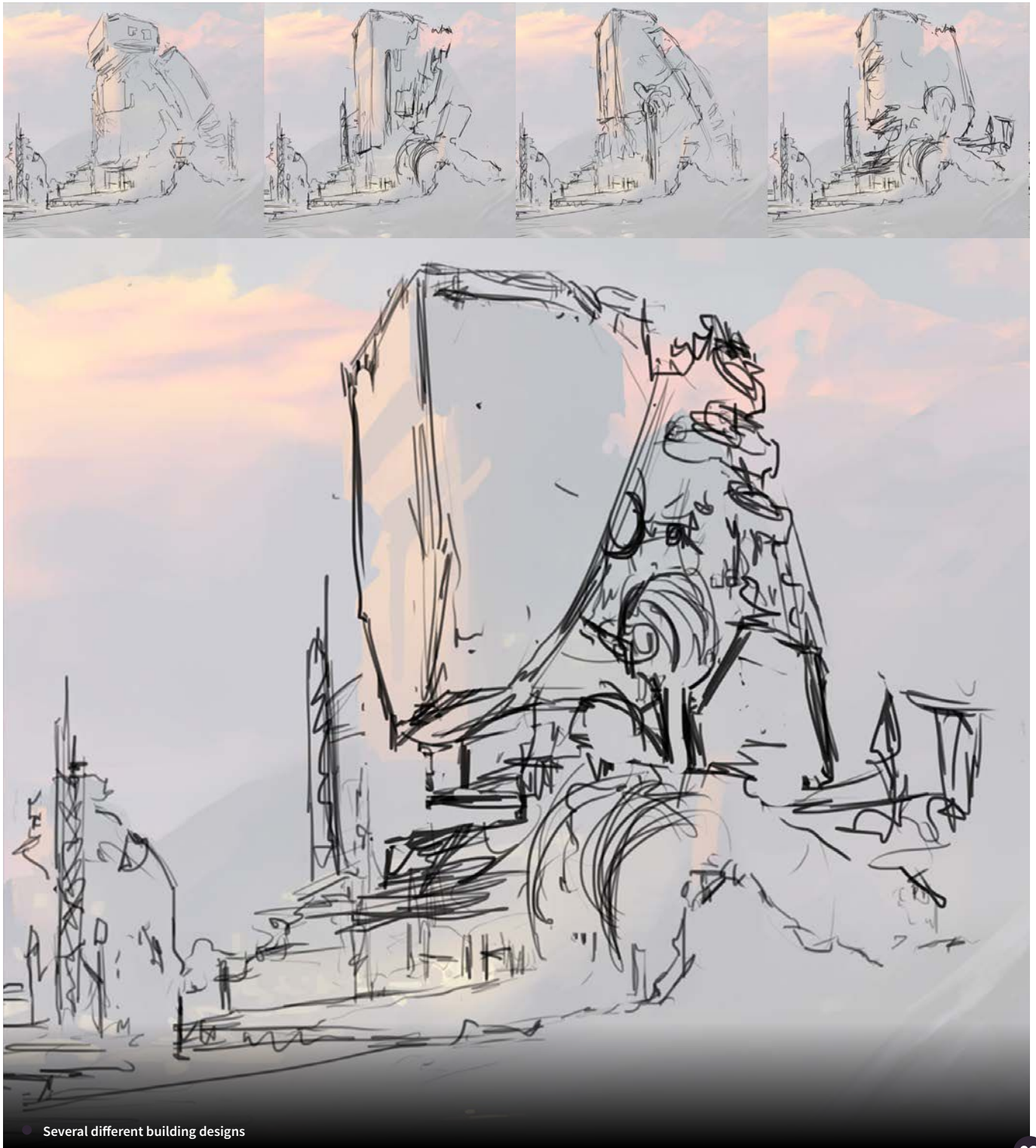


01c

To speed things up I took a photograph of a sunset and used it as the basis for the environment, it helped to set the lighting conditions of the whole piece and will make future steps easier to get right. It is very important to look up references for every part of your work, whether this is the mood, design, or setting. Guessing will not do you any favors unless you are very experience, and have a large amount of mental references.

02 Exploration of building design: Once I have a thumbnail I am happy with I move on to designing the building in the center of the canvas. I set myself a couple of rules for the building – it has to have a very simple shape to give it clear readability and it should have a top heavy feel to it. When designing buildings such as this I try to make it pleasant to look at; I like to split the detailed parts and the empty spaces to give the eyes places to rest. This is

why the design has a large shape at the top with very few details; it complements the intricate detail on the lower portion. I try to make it as random as possible because the human brain automatically looks for even spaced, regular areas and patterns. I draw the building using sketchy lines on a white layer with the opacity set to 50%. The line drawing doesn't need to be very detailed; it just needs enough information for me to further develop it later. ►

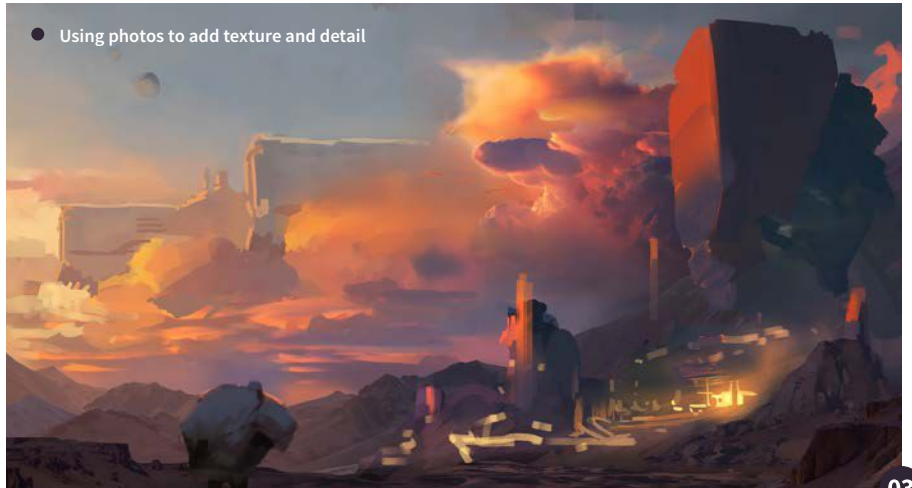


03 Creating a base with photos: I use photos as a starting point to build up the details. When I add photos I like to make adjustments before I apply them to the image. First I use Surface Blur (Filter > Blur > Surface Blur) which removes some of the small details that might stand out later. Then I color correct it using a Curves Adjustment Layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Curves) to adjust the RGB channel to match the photo's values to the painting's values. If the colors are still off I adjust the individual R, G, and B channels to get the best match. If necessary I use additional adjustment layers to add atmospheric perspective or highlights, as well as masks to remove anything I don't need.

“The way to approach this step is simple; color pick the colors from your photo bashed base and use those colors to paint in the blanks or add additional detail”

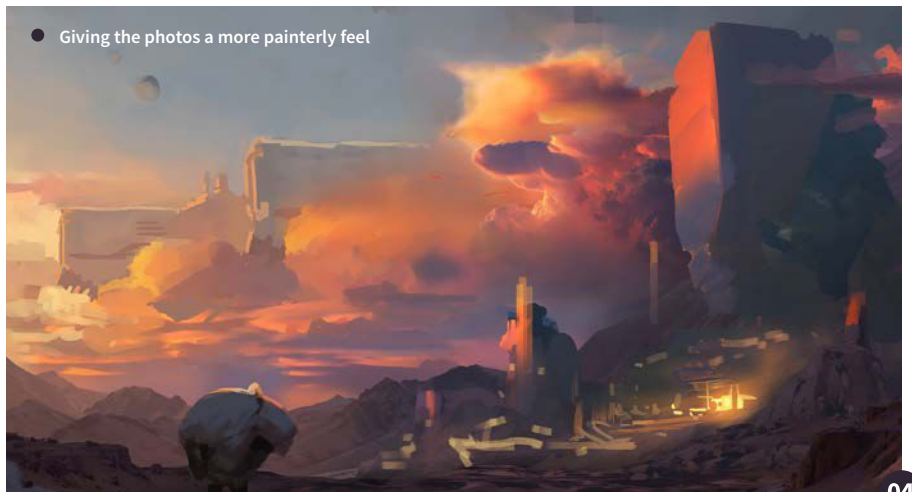
04 Tying it together: When I have a solid base of photos to work from, I paint over them to tie the whole piece together. This step is also to remove some of the photo collage effect from the image and make it more

● Using photos to add texture and detail



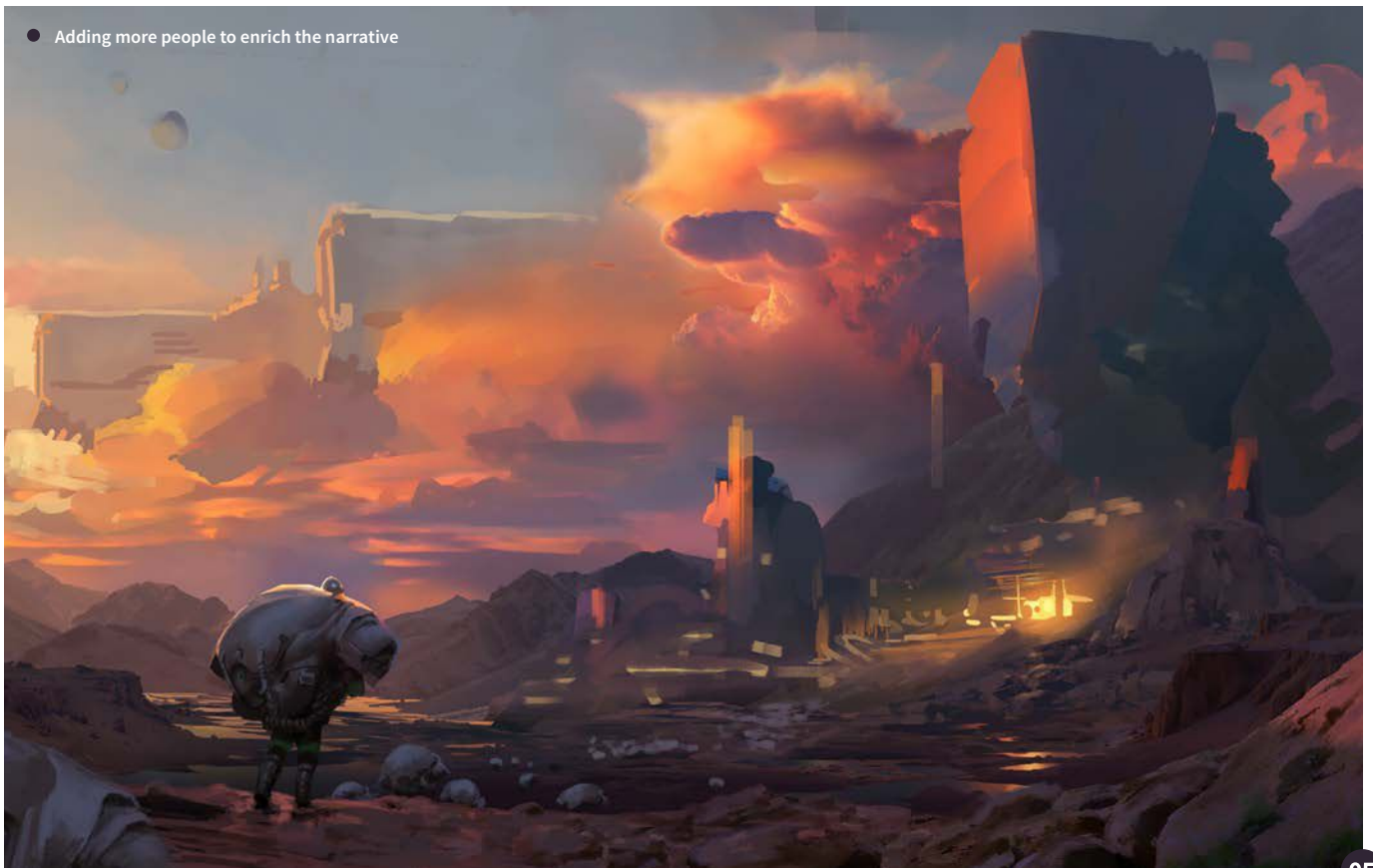
03

● Giving the photos a more painterly feel



04

● Adding more people to enrich the narrative



05

painterly. I prefer to have as little of the photos as possible visible in the final image. I will also fix things that still don't look natural after the color correction, such as the blue bounce light from the sky. The way to approach this step is simple; color pick the colors from your photo bashed base and use those colors to paint in the blanks or add additional detail.

05 Enriching the narrative: I decide to separate the foreground from the background, so that the painting, as a whole, and the foreground characters read more clearly. Instead of doing the usual dark foreground against a bright background, I will make the

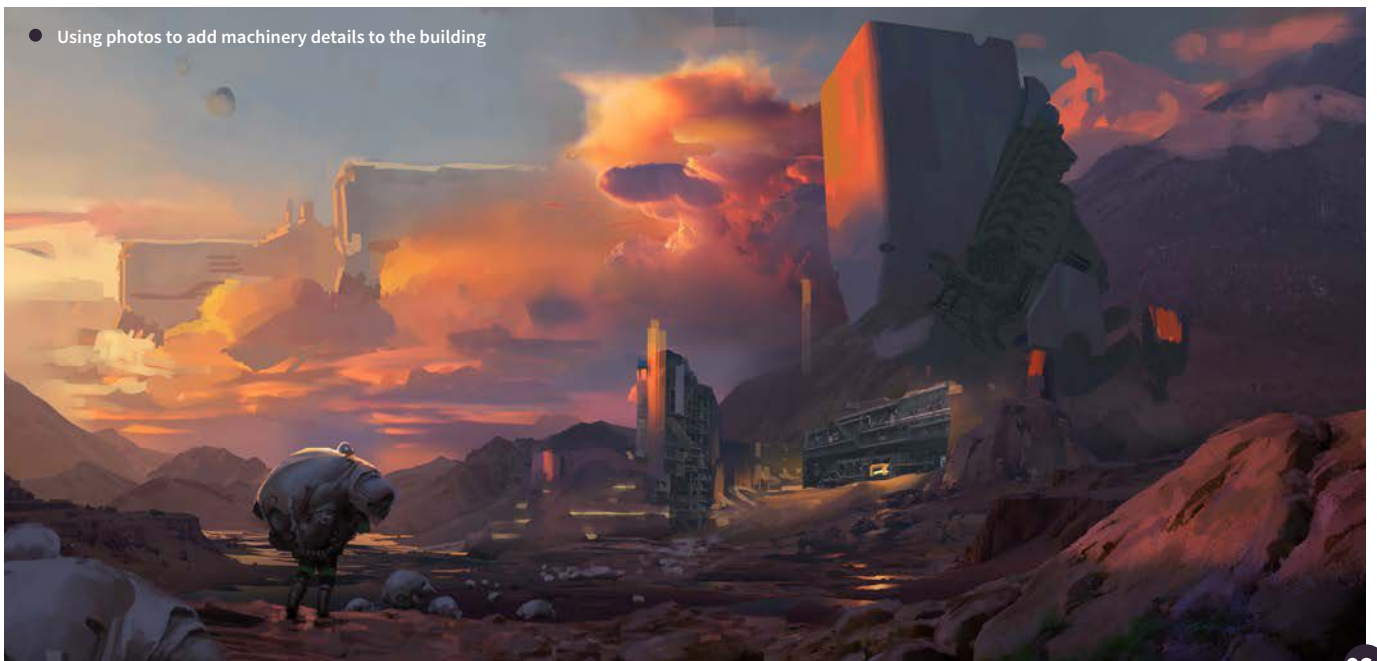
foreground lighter and separate it with a darker background. I also add the final environment details that will only need to be refined later. I add more characters to the piece as this will add to the narrative and enrich the story by having more people take part in this long journey. Later I will give the building and people something in common to further tie the image together.

06 Detailing the building: I have left working on the central building until now because with the surrounding environment mostly done it will be much easier to find the correct contrast and detail level. I follow the same process as Step 3 to add detail to the building,

except I do a lot more warping and transforming. It is important to think outside of the box if you are looking for an engine or something similar. Try using something different in place of what you are looking for, it could change your design for the better. I only use photos for the machinery part of the design as I prefer to paint the big surfaces.

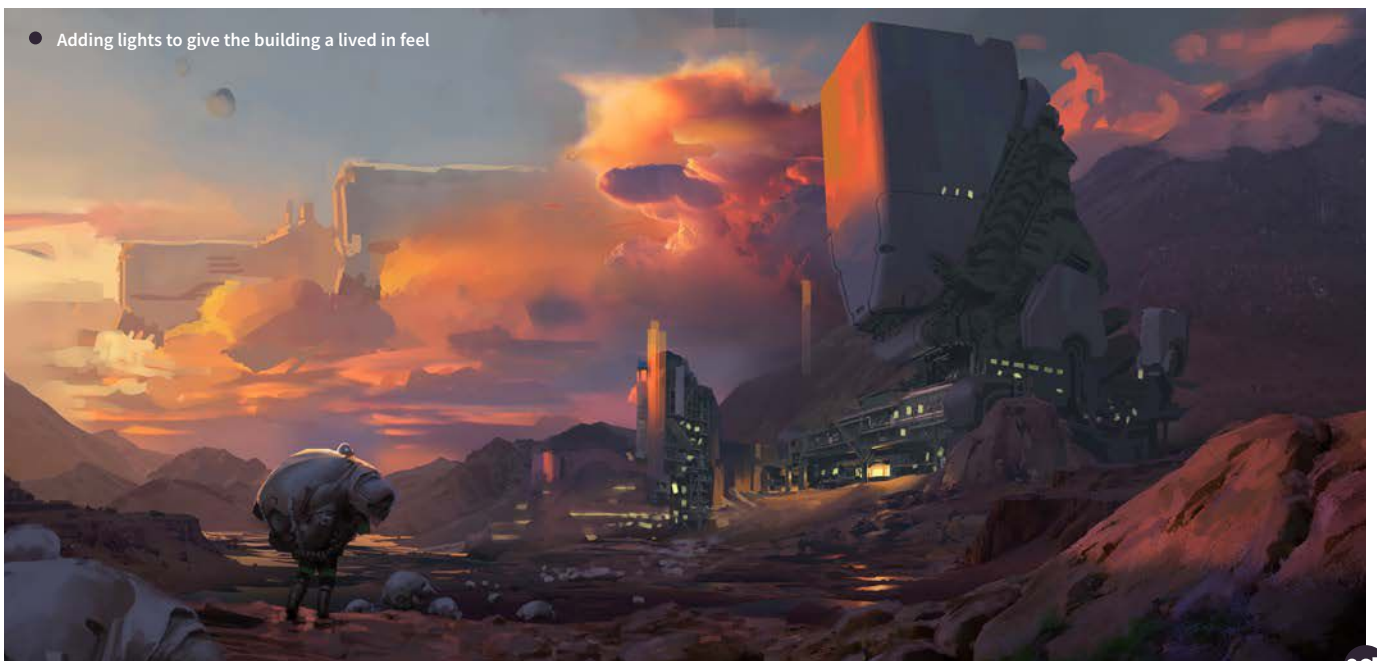
To create the big surfaces I use the Pen Tool (P). To follow the original building sketch, fill in the area with a solid color, and then use a Clipping Mask to add details on top. The machinery photos sit beneath this layer. When I am happy with the look of the building, I paint over it to add some final touches such as highlights and shadows. ►

● Using photos to add machinery details to the building



06a

● Adding lights to give the building a lived in feel



06b

- Adding some highlights and shadows



06c

- Adding depth and volume to the painting



“When I get to a specific point in my work, I prefer to work as loosely as possible, as all the restrictions of keeping to specific layers can harm my creativity”

07 Spatial improvements: I am happy with the building but not too sure about the environment. I have decided that the building is industrial in nature so I add some smoke coming out of it. I also paint some clouds in front of the building to add some spatial qualities to the image.

The more things overlapping each other the better! It will also emphasize the size of the building. To support the feeling I want to

convey, I make the light from the windows shine through the smoke using two layers. One underneath the building and one on top.

When I get to a specific point in my work, I prefer to work as loosely as possible, as all the restrictions of keeping to specific layers can harm my creativity. I keep the layers, to make sure I can always go between them.

08 Final touches: All the elements for the piece are now in place, and all that is left to do is to add some final touches and details to bring it to life. To finish the foreground, I add in stones by painting shadows between them. I also add texture to the big rock at the front of the image using the Multiply blend mode. This gives it the same level of detail as the rest of the image. I

remove the spaceships from the sky because they created too many focal points and were quite distracting. To replace them I painted in some contrails to give the impression of something in the sky but without actually showing them.

The contrails also direct the viewer's eye towards the focal point. A final few touches I make before finishing are adding chromatic aberration, grain, iris blur, lens distortion, and a vignette. None of these are necessary but they are great for adding extra realism to your work.

All the elements I need for the piece are now in place, and all that is left to do now is the very final touches and details. Much of it is not really needed, but it really helps to give a more finished look. ●





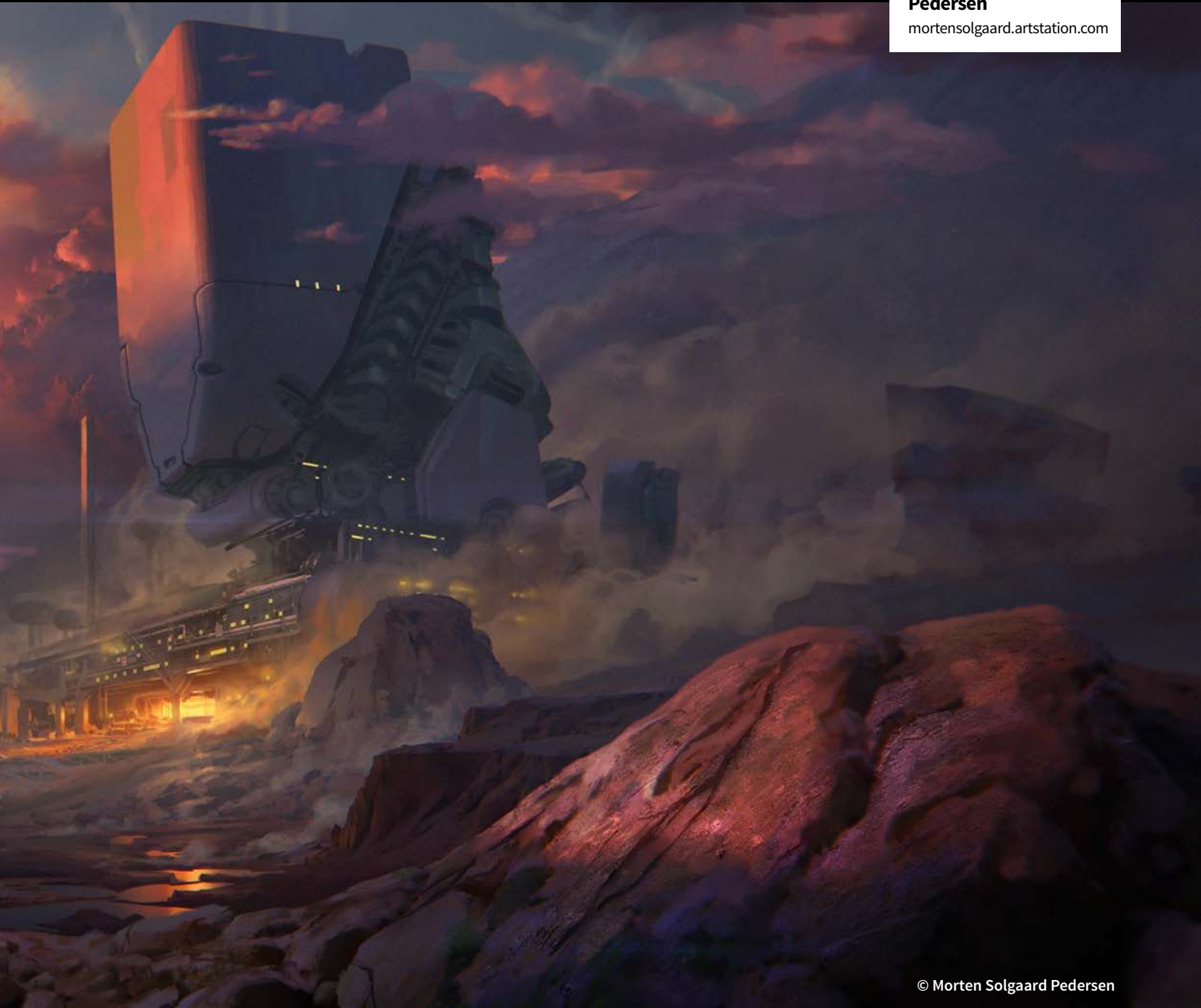
MORTEN SOLEHARD 2016

The Artist



**Morten Solgaard
Pedersen**

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The Artist



Andrey Maximov

artstation.com/artist/Andead

Software Used:

Photoshop

Andrey Maximov is the lead artist at Allods Team Studio. He graduated from the Art and Graphical faculty at Orel State University, Russia. He has worked in the television, gaming and printing industries. He is currently working on the MMORPG *Skyforge*.



Creating a luminous environment

Learn alternative techniques to bring your detailed fantasy paintings to life with Andrey Maximov ▶

All images © Andrey Maximov



Create a narrative based fantasy painting...

In this article I will go through the process I used to create *Make a Wish*. I use a variety of techniques and approaches when creating a new piece of art but not all of them are useful for every piece, it very much depends on the look and finish I am aiming for.

It is important to have a varied tool kit you can utilize for all your paintings. If you use the same few techniques your work will begin to look similar and stale. I will share some of my approaches, which hopefully will inspire you to use them in your future works.

01 Idea - sketch on paper: I started by sketching out some ideas. I find this is the fastest and easiest way to test out different ideas. If a sketch isn't working for me, I will try to do a little more exploration on the idea before scrapping it and trying something different. Once I was happy with the rough sketch I scanned it so I could work on it some more in Photoshop. My initial sketch is often quite different to the final painting because the composition is not yet finished or fixed.

02 Compositions: I continued working on the sketch. This step is for finding the best composition and balancing the tonal values. I frequently flip the canvas horizontally as

it helps me to find balance in the image and look at it with fresh eyes; I also find it useful to look at the work from a distance. I recommend getting up from your chair and viewing your work from a physical distance rather than zooming out; it is good to stretch your legs every now and then!

“I think it is important to divide your image in to three parts (foreground, middleground, and background) early on as it will make any adjustments you want to make much easier to do”



● The quick sketch on paper

03 The final sketch: During the composition phase I decided to change the perspective by removing the bottom up view of the town and expand the canvas. I also added in some fantasy elements such as floating rocks and a few planets in the sky.

I think it is important to divide your image in to three parts (foreground, middleground, and background) early on as it will make any adjustments you want to make much easier to do. It is also good to vary the size of different masses, e.g. the massive castle and small houses or the large planet and smaller satellites.



Looking for the best composition

02

04 Perspective grid: To help with lining up and working out the scale of objects I find it useful to use a perspective grid. Every artist will build up their images differently; some will do it free hand, but I prefer to use a grid to have a more accurate finish to the buildings; you need to find what works best for you. I draw parallel lines and use the Free Transform tool (Ctrl+T) to move and combine them into a grid that fits the perspective I am trying to achieve. I then put all the lines into a single group and set the opacity to 10%. This way I can see the grid without it interfering with or distracting me from the image. ►



Try expanding the boundaries of your image

03



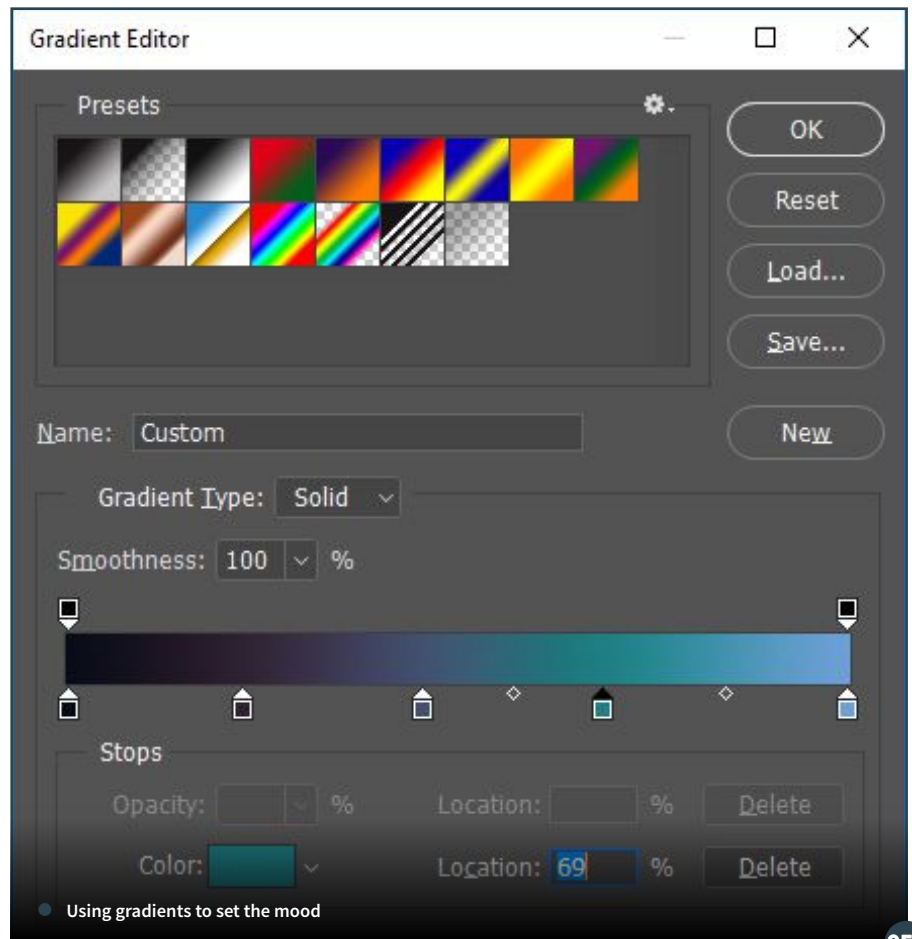
A perspective grid can be a very handy tool

04

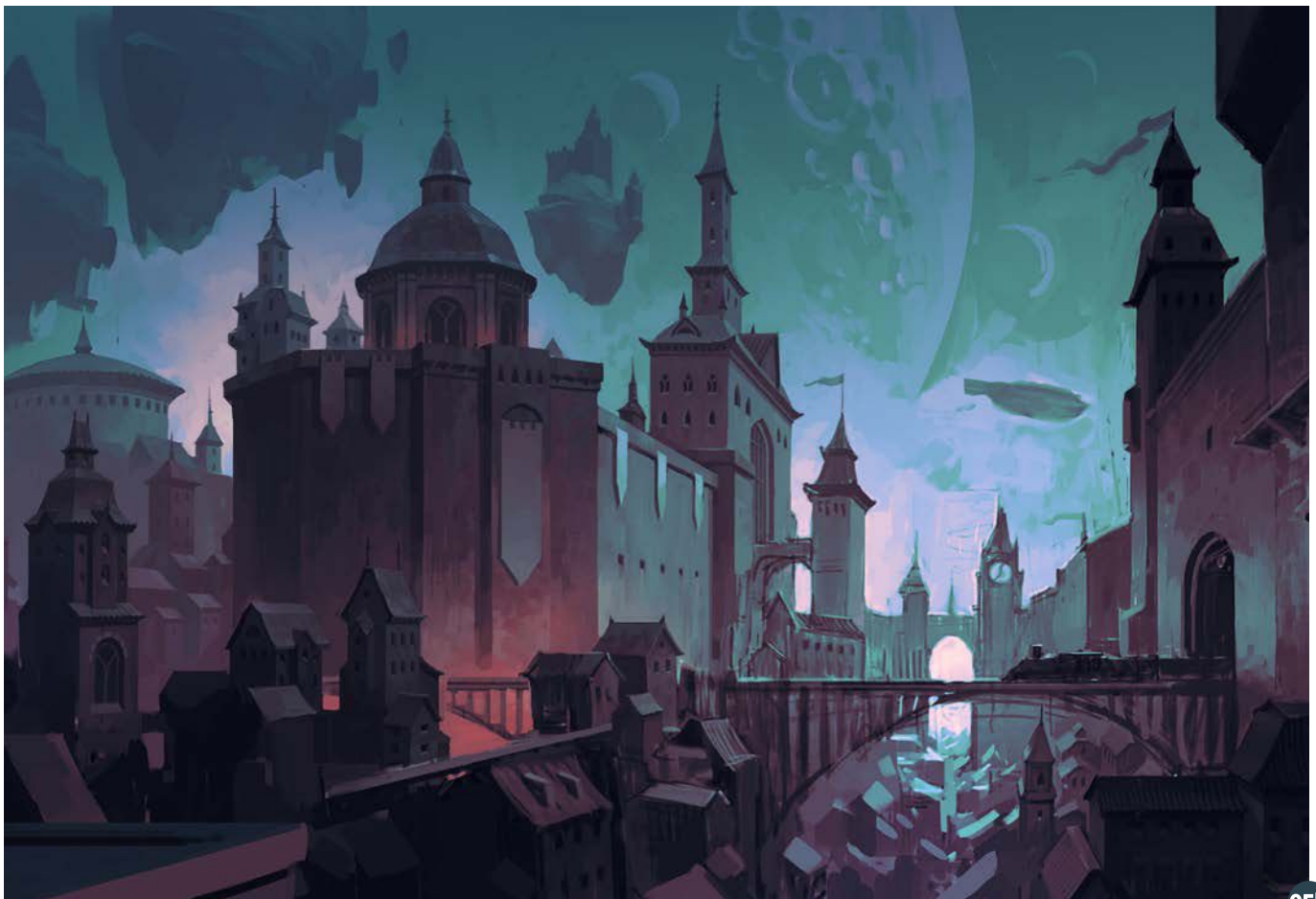
05 The base colors: To colorize the picture I used Gradient Maps (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Gradient Map). This method doesn't fully color the image but helps to set the basic tone that I can work on in future steps. I knew I wanted the city to give off an orange light but the Gradient Map doesn't work for this so I had to paint it in with a brush.

“Rendering the architecture was one of the most time consuming aspects of creating this painting”

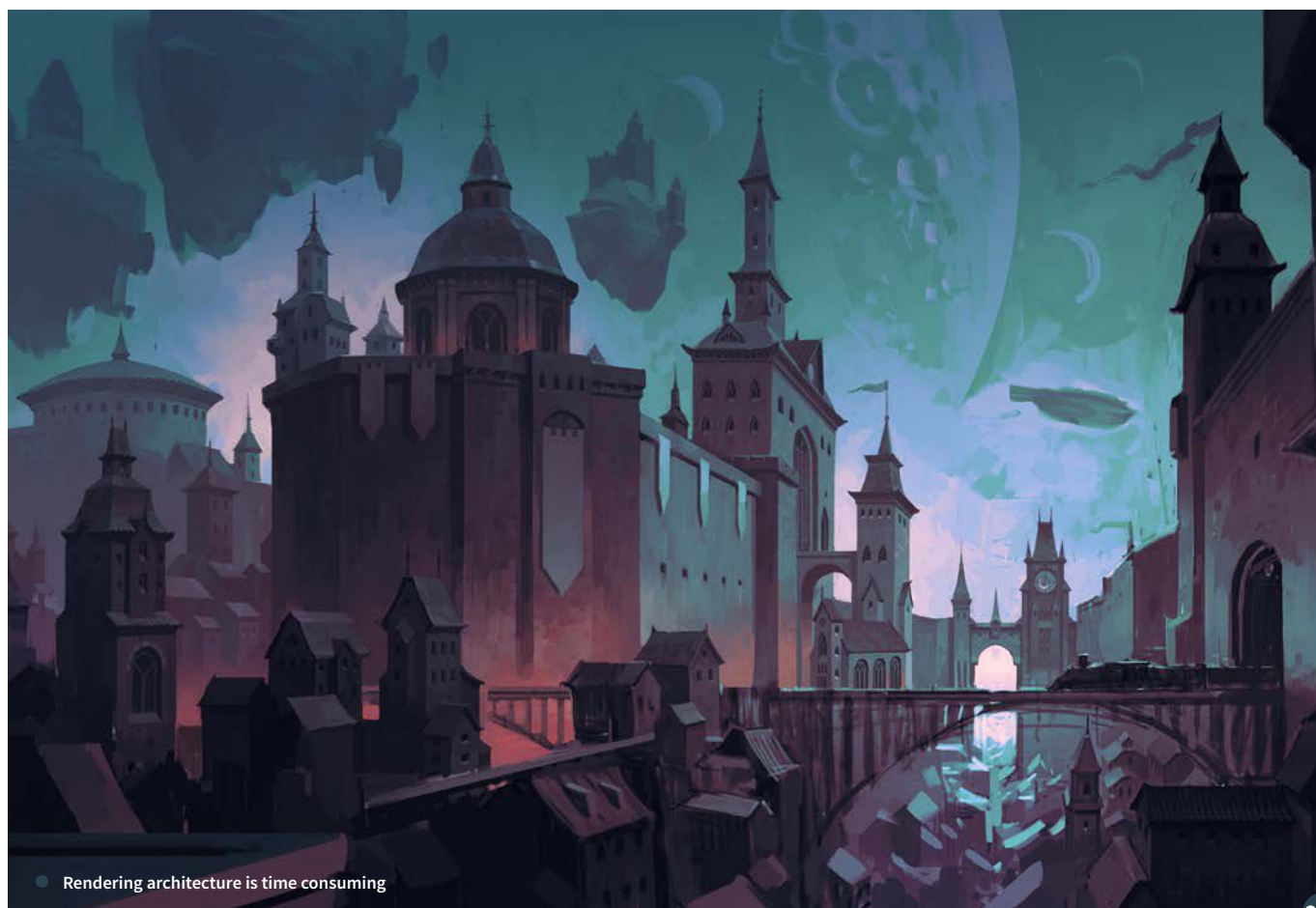
06 Details: Rendering the architecture was one of the most time consuming aspects of creating this painting. I used the perspective grid to build up the layers of buildings, walls, bridges, and so on. To help speed up this process I used photographs of cities as references. The Belgian city of Gent is a very beautiful place with amazing architecture, which was perfect for my painting. I continued to add details to the buildings, as well as adding clouds, stars, and heraldry to the flags; each object was on its own layer so I could work on one without affecting the others. ►



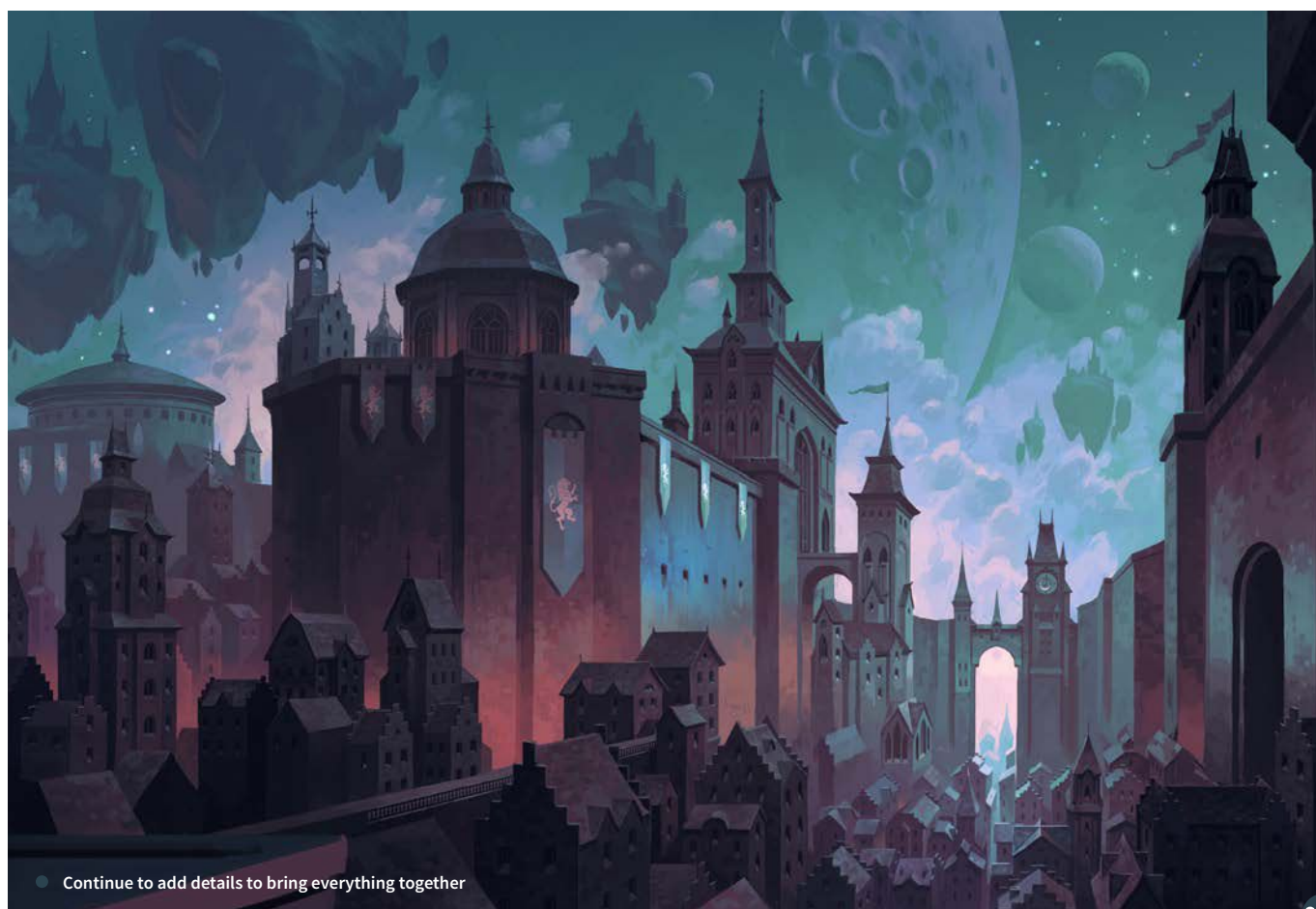
05a



05b



06a



06b

07 Adding life: At this point I took a step back to critically look at the painting. I quickly realized it was quite boring, there wasn't enough action, narrative, or eye-catching areas. This is when I decided to add the orange lanterns used for making wishes. I also added a terrace where a character could launch his lantern in to the sky. This simple addition really brought the painting to life; having the lights on different planes added emphasis and color accents to the whole piece.

08 The bridge: All that was left to add to the painting was the bridge and train – I kept them both on separate layers so I didn't mess up the city behind. I used references of bridges steam locomotives from the late 19th Century. The bridge not only acts as a good looking element but also as an important part of the composition because it lies parallel to the horizon, and pierces the city from left to right, appearing both in front of and behind the



Bringing the painting to life

07



The bridge helps to bring the composition together

08

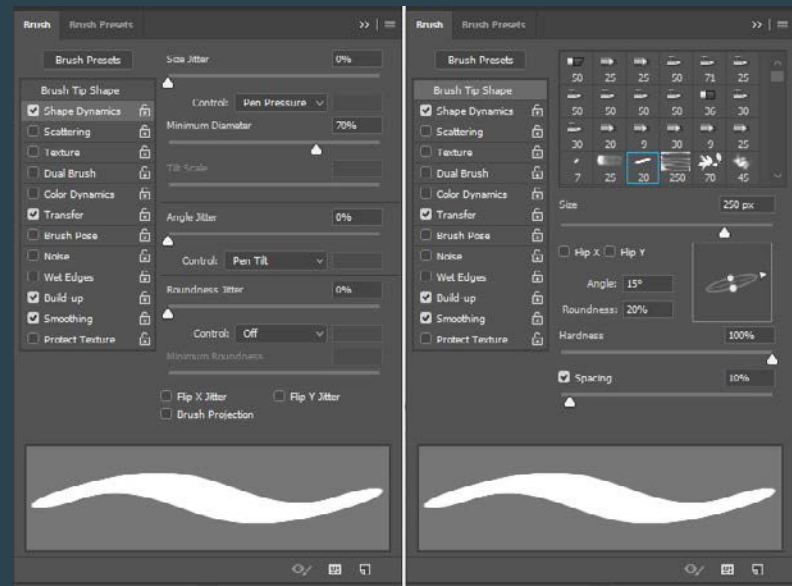
house. It helps to delineate the negative space and makes the whole piece come together.

09 More life: The work was almost complete, all the main elements were in place but it lacked those little details of a bustling city full of life. I added smoke coming from the chimneys, banners and flags on the buildings, and rings on the big planet in the sky. I also added lights in the windows, I used a different color so they didn't overlap and distract from the lanterns. To add contrast to the cold green sky I added a spot of warm light to the lower city – this also helped to give the illusion of heat rising from the streets.

10 Color Correction: The final step was to do some color correction, I don't always use the same filters and adjustment layers for every painting. For this piece I used a vignette, which darkened the edges of the canvas, a Color Balance layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance) to make the colors purer, and a Noise filter to add a light texture to the picture. With these final touches I was done! ●

PRO TIPS My basic brush

I tend to use the same brush for most things. It is flat, a bit like a calligraphic pen, and is sensitive to the tilt of the stylus.



Adding the final details

The Artist



Andrey Maximov
artstation.com/artist/Andead



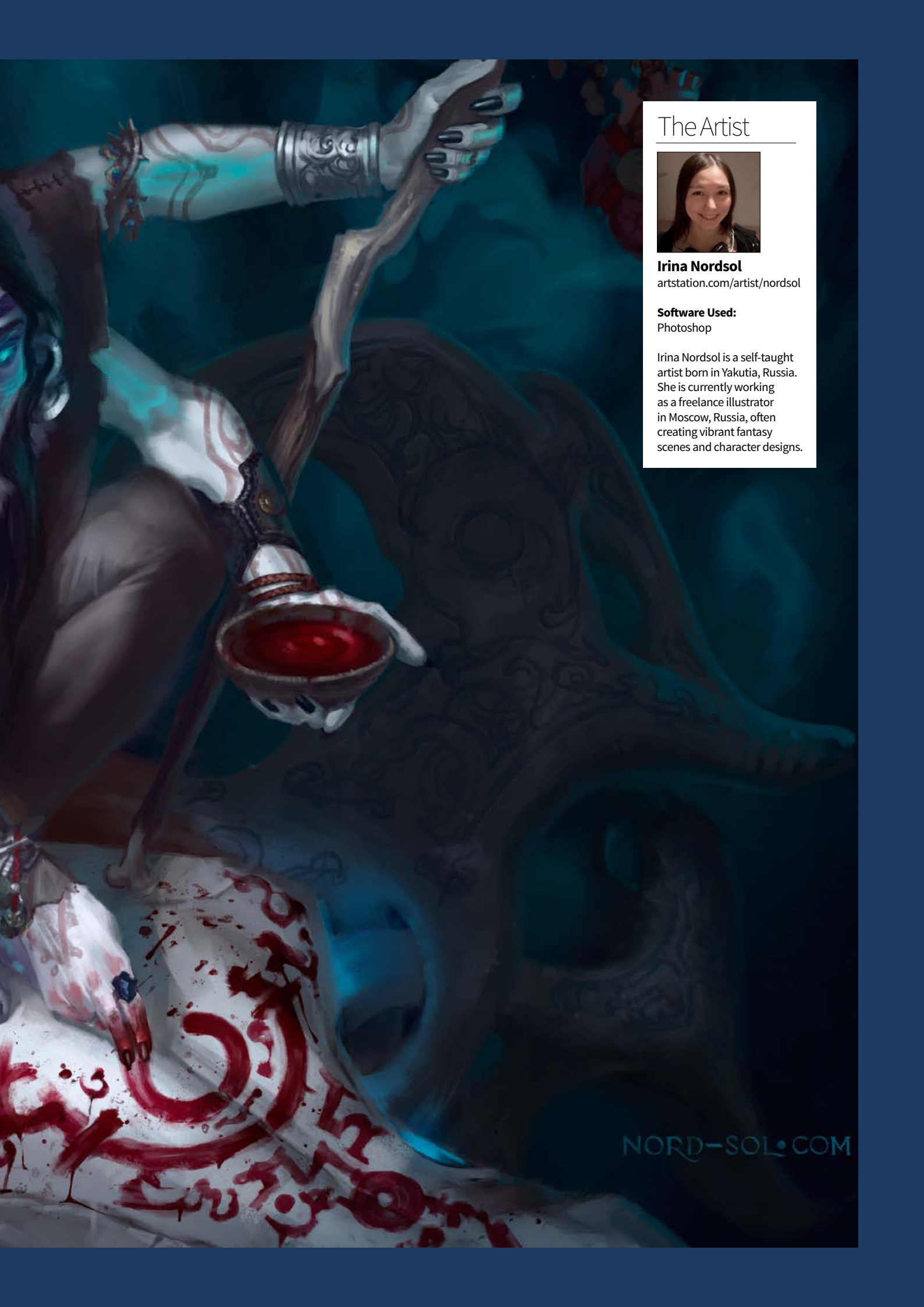




Painting a dark fantasy shaman

Irina Nordsol shares her process for creating *Haranna Udagan*, a dark illustration done for a collectible card game competition [▶](#)

All images © Irina Nordsol



The Artist



Irina Nordsol

artstation.com/artist/nordsol

Software Used:

Photoshop

Irina Nordsol is a self-taught artist born in Yakutia, Russia. She is currently working as a freelance illustrator in Moscow, Russia, often creating vibrant fantasy scenes and character designs.

NORD-SOL.COM

Take a look at creating dark illustrations...

In this making of article I'm going to explain my process of creating a fantasy illustration, while also trying to explain the thinking behind my choices. Creating an illustration is a very complex process where you have to solve a lot of different problems; you start with an idea or story and then have to work out all the elements (composition, lights, colors and so on) to bring it together. It gets easier if you put most of the thinking into the thumbnail stages. It is very important to do thumbnails as they are great for trying out different ideas before settling on a final one to work on.

This illustration was made for a contest held by the makers of *Berserk* (a Russian collectible card game). The task was to create a fantasy illustration based on one of the factions from the game – mountains, steppes, swamps, forests, and darkness – I picked darkness, which is represented by renegades who are looking for forbidden knowledge, at any cost. I wanted to do something grim, and also use a character from Yakutia's culture; Yakutia is in Russia and it is known for severe winters and shamanic paganism. I rarely copy cultural elements but often use them for inspiration; in this case I also wanted to give the illustration a Nordic feel.

01 Looking for ideas: I find it difficult to create an illustration without a theme. I didn't want it to be just a gloomy character, but also have a narrative and interesting background. I always start sketching out different ideas – I don't usually show these to anyone, but I felt this article wouldn't be honest without them. I think it is important to understand that everyone has their own creative way, and not every step has to be perfect. At this stage I don't worry about composition or proportions, my main goal is to get down all the ideas; I make quick sketches, write things down – anything that helps me to sort them out.

02 Initial sketches: All the mess I created should be cleaned and fitted in to nicely separated boxes. I worked on the story, composition, values, and lighting to tidy up my rough lines from the previous step. I have plenty of ideas to choose from which on the one hand is good, but on the other is tough, as



Rough sketches to sort out my ideas

01



A nice set of initial sketches, but I was not quite happy with any of them

02

making a decision can be very difficult. I am not in love with any of these sketches; I want to find something that makes my heart beat faster! I sometimes show these sketches to other people (clients or friends) to get some feedback and check that the narrative is understandable.

“Exploring ideas at this point is perfect for defining your idea or mood – in fact almost anything – and change it immediately if you don't like it”

03 Exploring some more: You may be wondering why I am still working on sketches, but I learned the hard way how important it is to solve problems at this stage

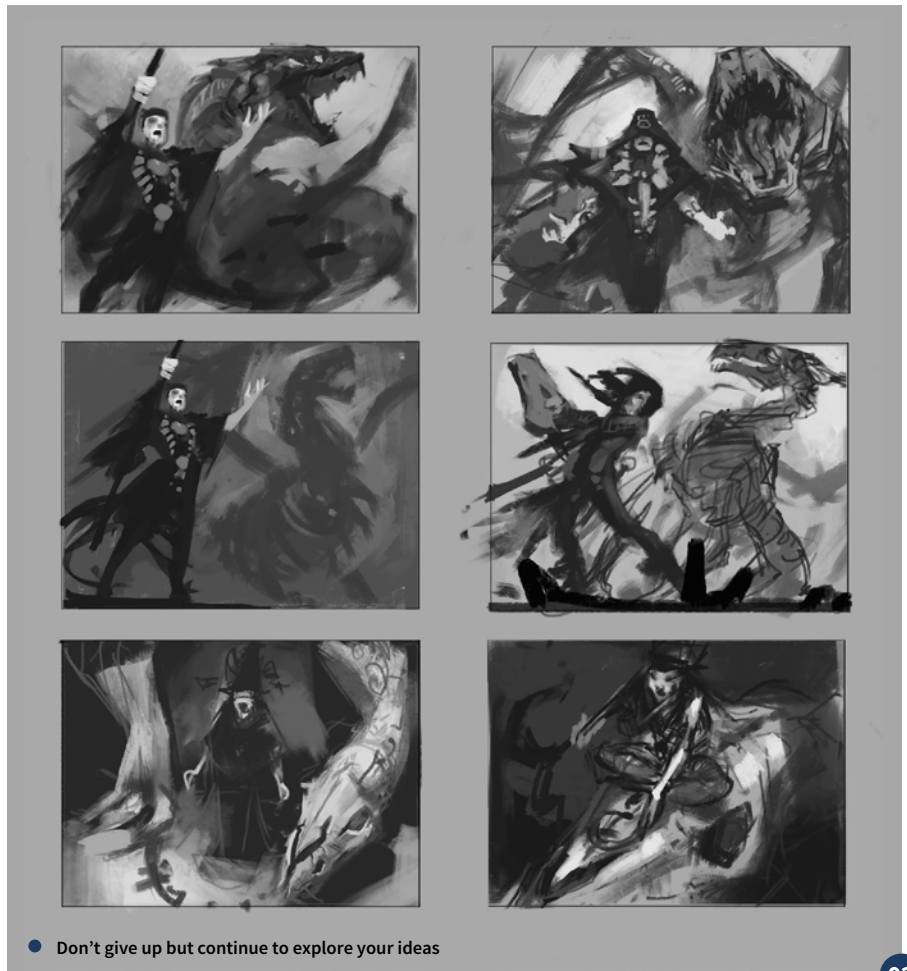
when it is relatively easy to make corrections. Exploring ideas at this point is perfect for defining your idea or mood – in fact almost anything – and change it immediately if you don't like it. I used to spend very little time on sketches, thinking it would work itself out eventually but it rarely did. I would end up spending more time trying to fix something that could have been sorted earlier if only I had taken the time to do more sketching. For example, it is difficult to change the composition when the canvas is 3,000 pixels, and the characters are highly detailed.

I knew I wanted to have a necromancer and undead dragon, even though I already had lots of sketches I wasn't particularly happy with any of them, so I did one more. In this one the shaman girl is perched on the dragon's skull working her

dark magic. If you show your sketches to your friends and they like different ones to you, that is okay because you can ask them what it is about that sketch that draws them in. Once you have an idea of what attracts them, you can incorporate that aspect into the sketch you are drawn to.

04 Finally starting!: As much as I want to go straight to adding color to my sketch, I actually created a rough copy of the line art and added color to that. I prefer to do it this way so I can easily try out different color schemes. This method is good if you need to control the layers (which is often the case with professional illustrations) so it is a good idea to make it part of your practice. Clients will probably ask you to keep many elements separate, such as background, characters, and foreground, especially if they are using it for animation.

The line art of the character and dragon are on separate layers, as well as their color layers – this means I can easily change something without affecting everything else. Although I already knew the light and color scheme I wanted to use for this illustration, I still find it useful to try out different ones to find the best fit possible. ►



03



04

05 Working on volume and anatomy:

For this step I picked different parts of the picture to work on one by one, and tried to make it look better by playing with values and adding details. I merged the line art and color layers for each part (select the layers you want to merge together and press Ctrl+E). So I had four layers: the shaman, blood seal detail, dragon head, and background. I didn't need to worry about composition or lighting because I had already sorted this out in the early sketches; I was happy with them and didn't need to change anything. I was happy with the color scheme; all it needed was to be a little richer and more saturated to make it look more interesting.

With all the basics sorted I could spend time concentrating on the anatomy of the girl and dragon skull. I can't stress enough how important it is to use references, there are lots of suitable references on the internet and if you can't find what you need then use yourself as a model; there is really no excuse! This stage of the process can be quite boring to explain because I just continued rendering and adding more details.

06 Unexpected events:

I started this step by adding more color, this time using a layer in Soft Color blending mode to color the clothes and make them look more like leather – the brown contrasted nicely with the dark blue background, making her darker and more mysterious. I kept working on the details of clothing and her face.

The girl should be mysterious and dark and I liked the idea of some creepy effects that are only visible in the shadows. You can see the beginning of this idea in the previous step: her eye in the shadow looks different, and there is a part of spirit tattoo visible on her hand.

But then I thought "Wait, she should have something to take the blood from. Maybe I should give her a bowl or something? But I like both right hands, I don't want to choose." Happily, I don't have to! Her having three hands is creepy and weird and it works for the idea of the picture nicely. So I kept both of them!

07 More work on details:

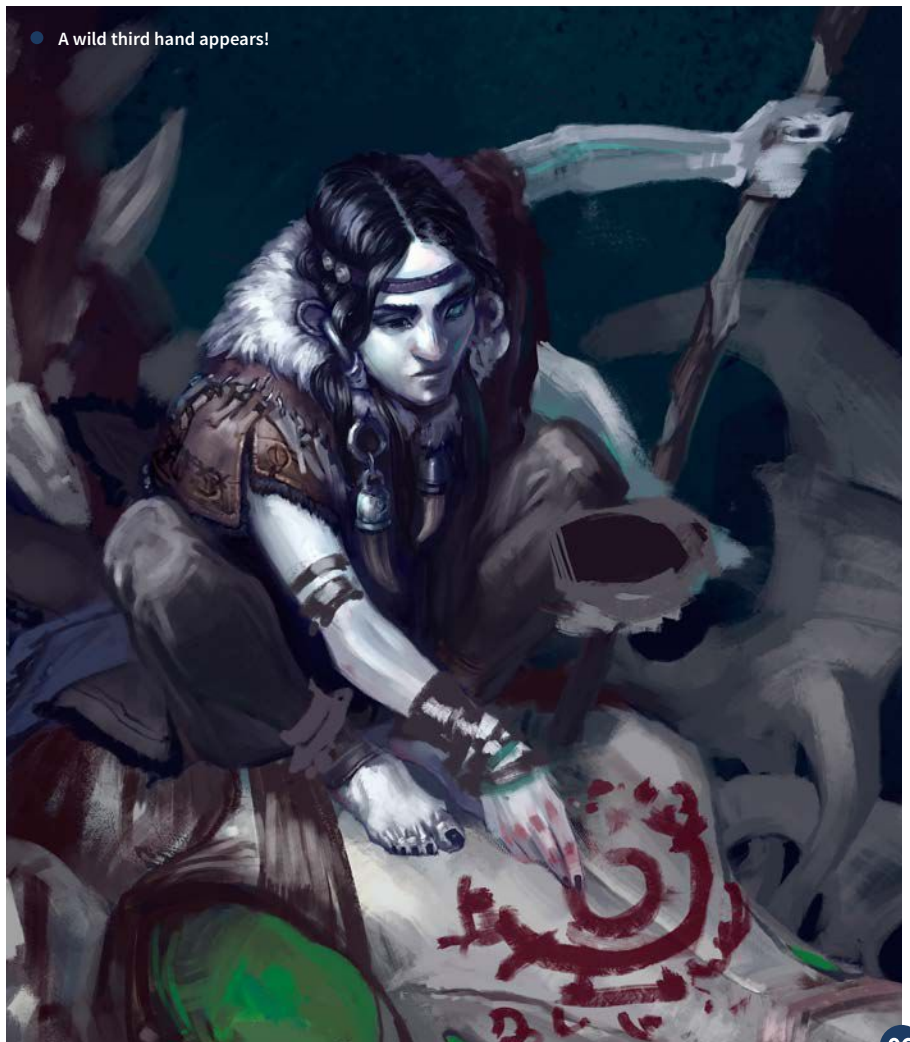
As I said, my mind is very disorganized artistically. That's why I can't do clean line art, then fill it with clean base color, then add clean light and shadow... I like it messy! I need to jump

● Getting accurate anatomy is a vital part of any character illustration



05

● A wild third hand appears!



06

from one object to another, otherwise it gets boring. I don't think that's a good approach and I'm trying to work on it, looking for some way that would be more organized and efficient.

In the meantime, I do my art as I can. It's important to remember that in order to find your perfect workflow, you should actually create something, and then again and again, trying different approaches, looking for what suits you best. In time you'll find it, but only if you practice, it's useless to just sit there and wait.

At this stage I was still figuring out the hand anatomy, throwing in some jewelry, working on the dragon... I gave him some muscles at first and then some skin on his neck. I made his neck less spiky afterwards — too many spikes took the attention from the focal point.

The background was going to be a spooky forest — I liked the idea but the rhythm of the trees needed some work. I also darkened the picture edges a little bit, again, just so the focal point drew the eye more easily.

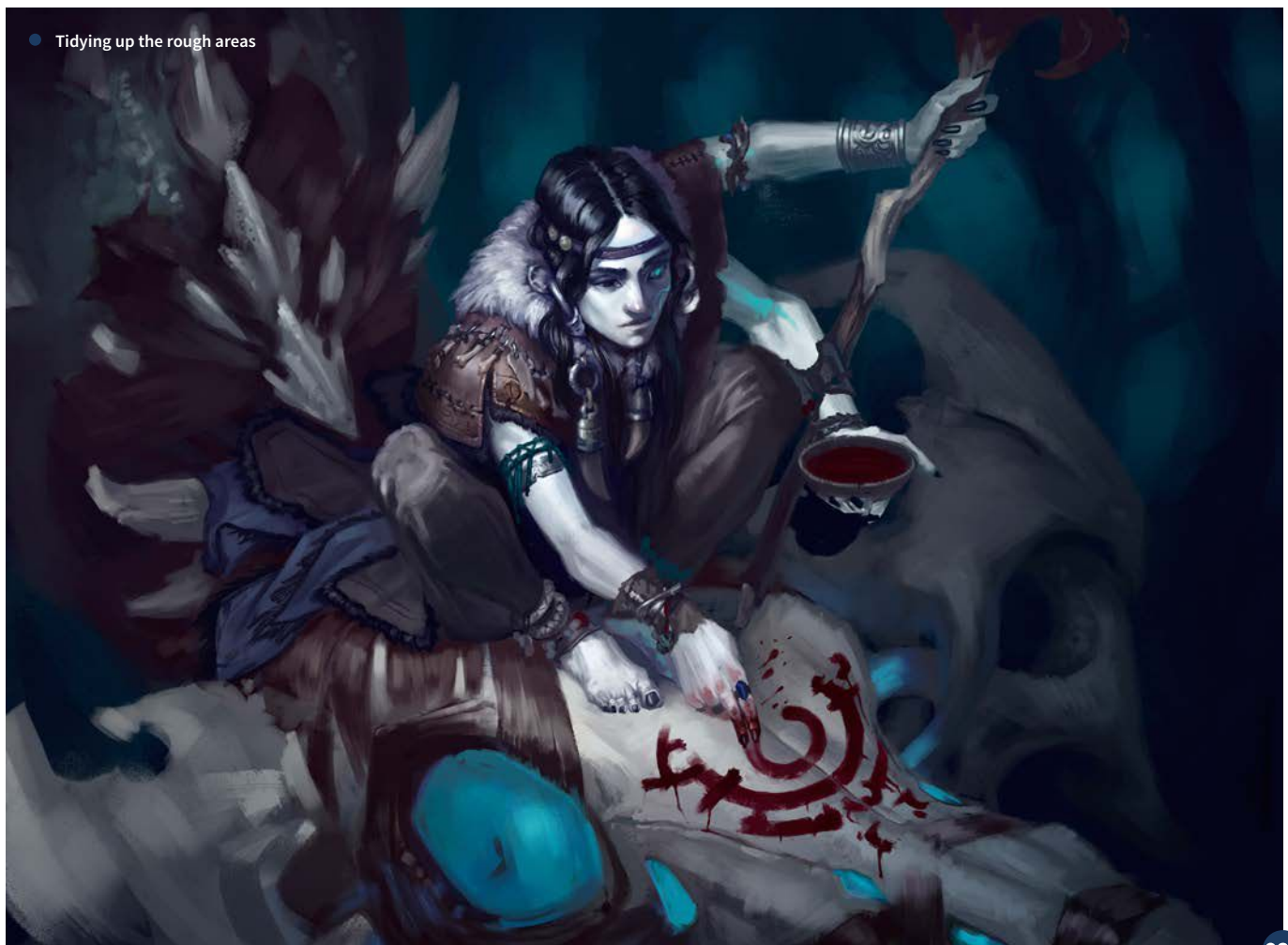


● Adjusting things

07

08 Tidying up the details: There were still some rough areas left over from the previous stage, so I spent a bit of time getting rid of them. I mostly concentrated on the shaman girl's face, jewelry, and hands; making them more precise and clean. I made her face more

delicate and worked on making the shadow spooky with an ethereal shine. Another thing I thought needed work was the bloody symbol. I studied how blood looks and reacts when drawn with, and specifically I tried to get the right look of blood on her fingers and on the skull. ►



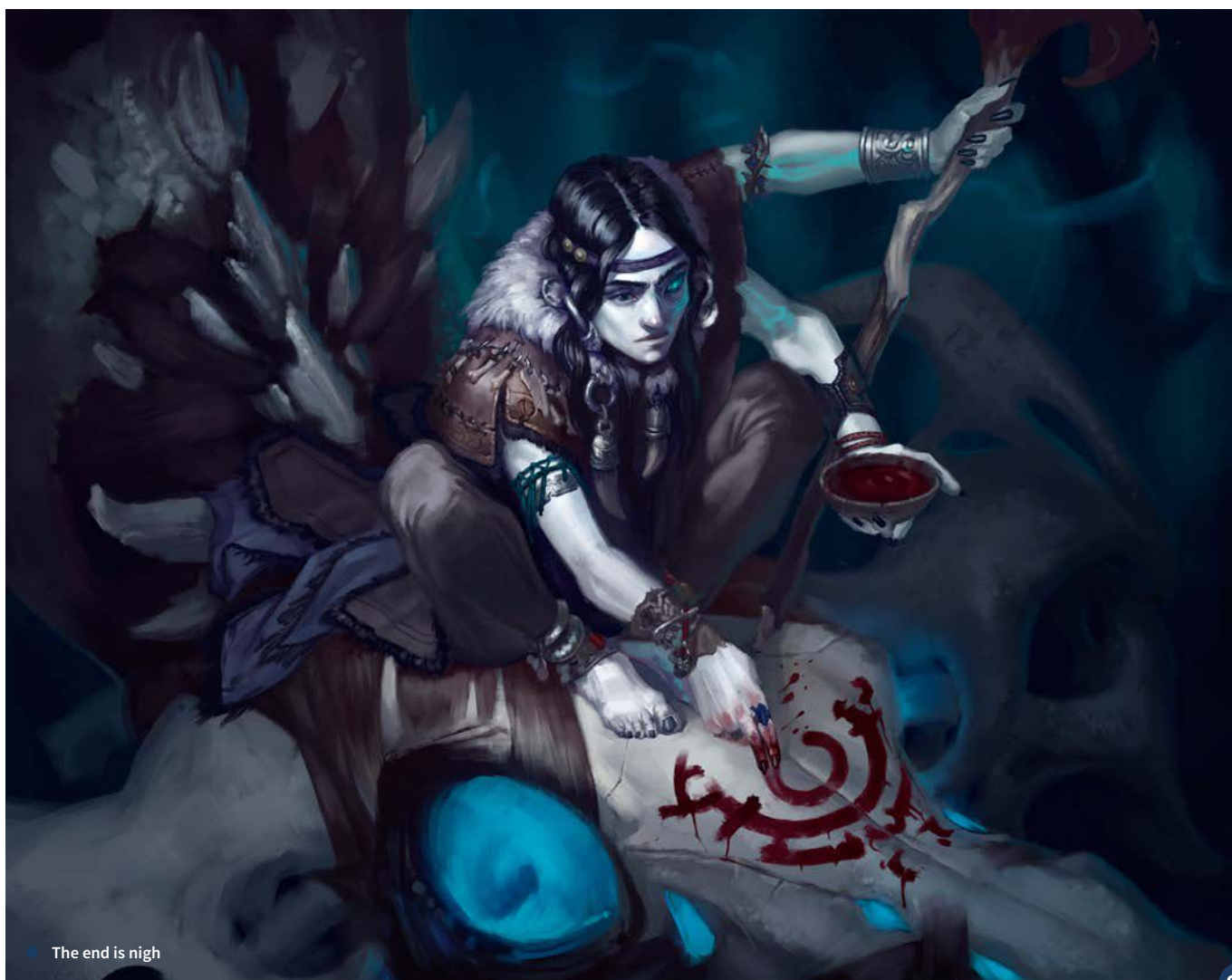
● Tidying up the rough areas

08a



Close up of the blood seal

08b



The end is nigh

09

“Never be afraid to ask for feedback from fellow artists or friends, and take on board their comments”

09 Adding more details: I added some spirits to the background to enhance the narrative, but I was not happy with the trees, so I darkened the edges of the canvas even more. I used to be afraid of having dark and soft areas in my work. I would worry that people would think the piece as unfinished or I was lazy – I tried to make everything sharp and clear, but this meant my work was difficult to read. I used to think I was finished, not able to see what else I could do. If I showed it to a friend they often said it looked nice but was I going to finish it. This really annoyed me mostly because they were right and I didn’t know how to fix it. To get over this I analyzed my work, asked for feedback from others, and looked at other artist’s work to figure out what changes I could make. Never be afraid to ask for feedback from fellow artists or friends, and take on board their comments. For example if they said the background looks rough then add more detail and go back to them with your changes. It can be difficult to hear criticism, but if it is constructive you can learn from it.

10 Finishing touches: I did a bit more work on the background; it was important not to overdo the background as it wouldn’t draw too much attention from the focal point. There were only a few final touches I needed to make to bring the piece together, these included enlarging the shaman’s head, changing the dragon’s horns, and giving her a tattoo.

The last thing I did was to make small adjustments to the light and color. I used a Color Balance Adjustment layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance) to add a little warmth, a light blue layer in the Soft Light blending mode (Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options > Soft Light) to show more light on the character, and also a layer with a touch of green in the Color Dodge blending mode (Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options > Color Dodge) to her shadow. The final step was to give my work a name, *Haranna Udanag*, which is Yakutian for dark shaman. ●

PRO TIPS

Is your idea clear?

Illustrations, especially card illustrations, should show the story clearly, even on a very small canvas. I was given the following advice and now use it in all of my illustrations; if you want to check the readability of your work you need to do two things.

First convert your image to black and white to check the values. You can either desaturate it using the Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Hue/Saturation) and slide the Saturation slider all the way to the left. Or you can use the Black & White Adjustment layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Black & White) and move both sliders to the middle.

The second thing is to use the Levels Adjustment layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels) to find the areas with the highest contrast as these are the ones that will draw the viewer’s focus. You want the main focal point to have the highest contrast and therefore be clearly readable even with this adjustment.

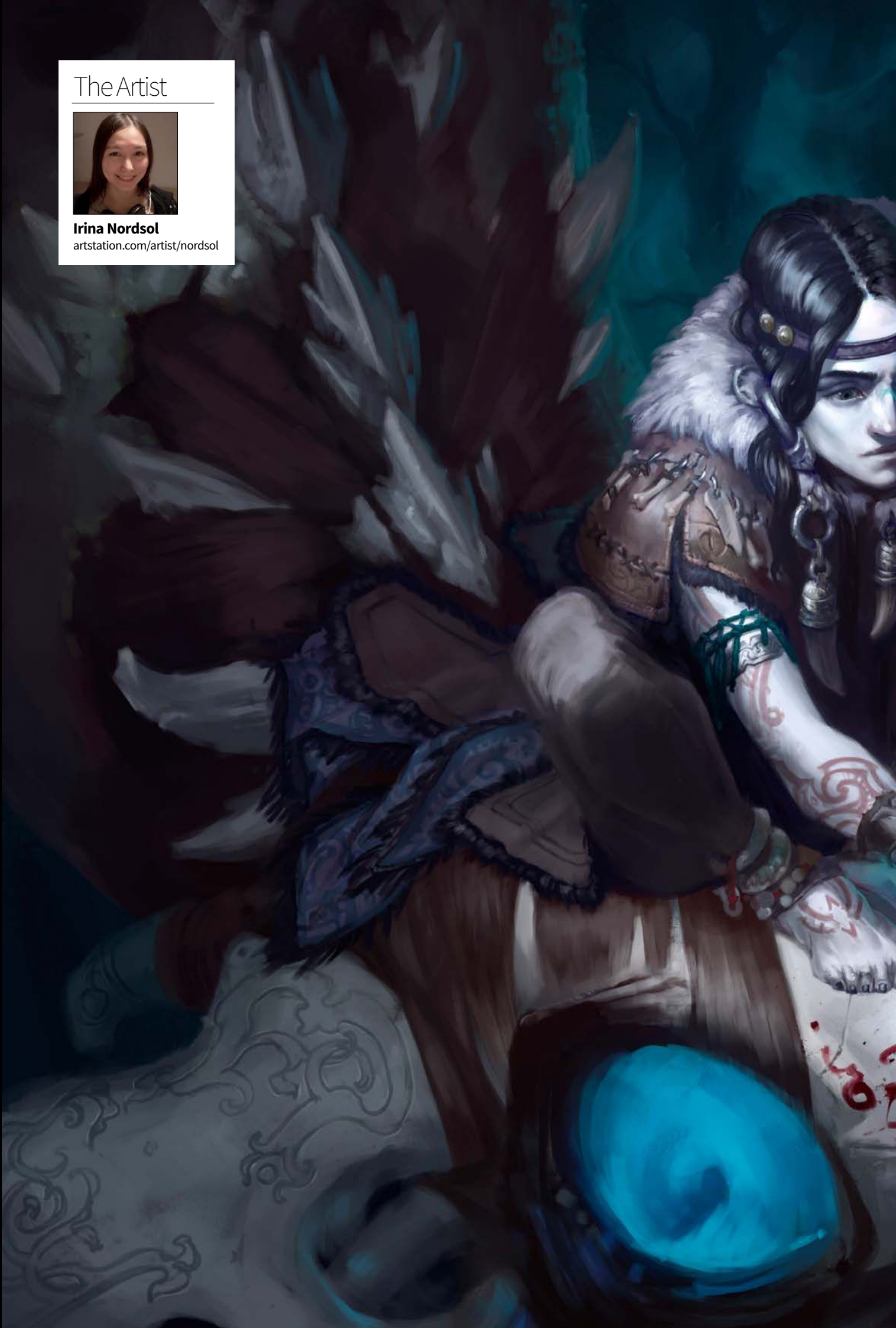


The Artist



Irina Nordsol

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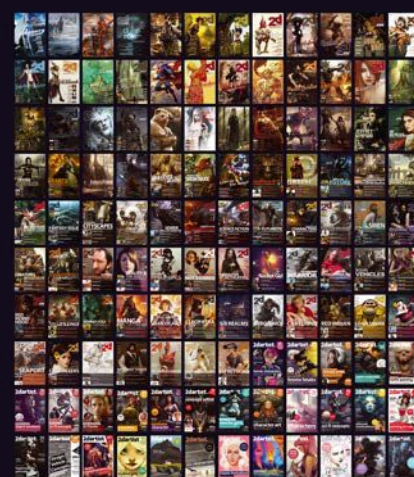




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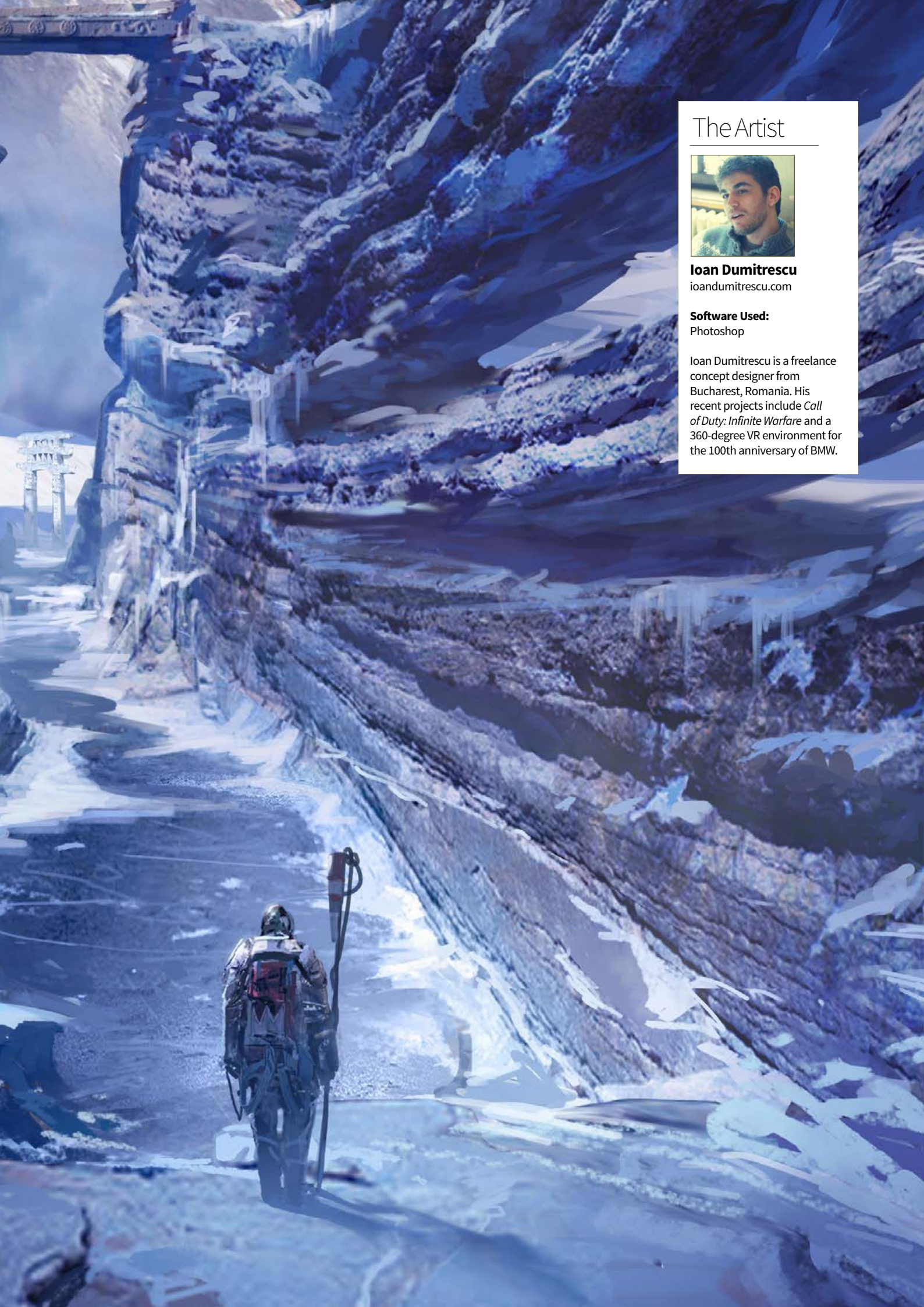
The Artist



Ioan Dumitrescu
ioandumitrescu.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Ioan Dumitrescu is a freelance concept designer from Bucharest, Romania. His recent projects include *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* and a 360-degree VR environment for the 100th anniversary of BMW.



Inner Search started as an image that popped up in my head during some freelance work. For me, personal work is blowing off steam but it doesn't mean I want to play in the same courtyard I did with the last image! Instead, I always try to challenge myself with new compositions, designs and ideas. Even if there is a chance to fail, I will take my time on it until it starts looking like something, or it doesn't. It's no problem if it doesn't end well because it's all about learning from your mistakes.

The image I had in my head consisted of a canyon-like corridor leading towards a bridge of some sort, with buildings of Chinese influence all over the tops of the mountains. A traveler heading towards Shangri-La, in a mountainous setting that would show the difficulties one might meet along the way; from cold temperatures and bone-freezing winds, to the actual environment that would be treacherous before reaching the promise land of tranquility.

Line sketch

Before anything, I do a very quick line sketch, using perspective in order to establish my composition. I want the viewer's eyes to travel along this corridor, hit the bridge and rest alongside it and then finish up in the far background, then finally returning to where it started: at the traveling man.

Adding a rough color

To make this image follow the dreamlike quality I envisioned for it, I started putting in a rough color wash. My thoughts were to take the old Grand Canyon colors and use blues and cyans instead; with the mountains, snow and overexposed clouds from the sun. I knew the blue and magentas would contrast nicely.

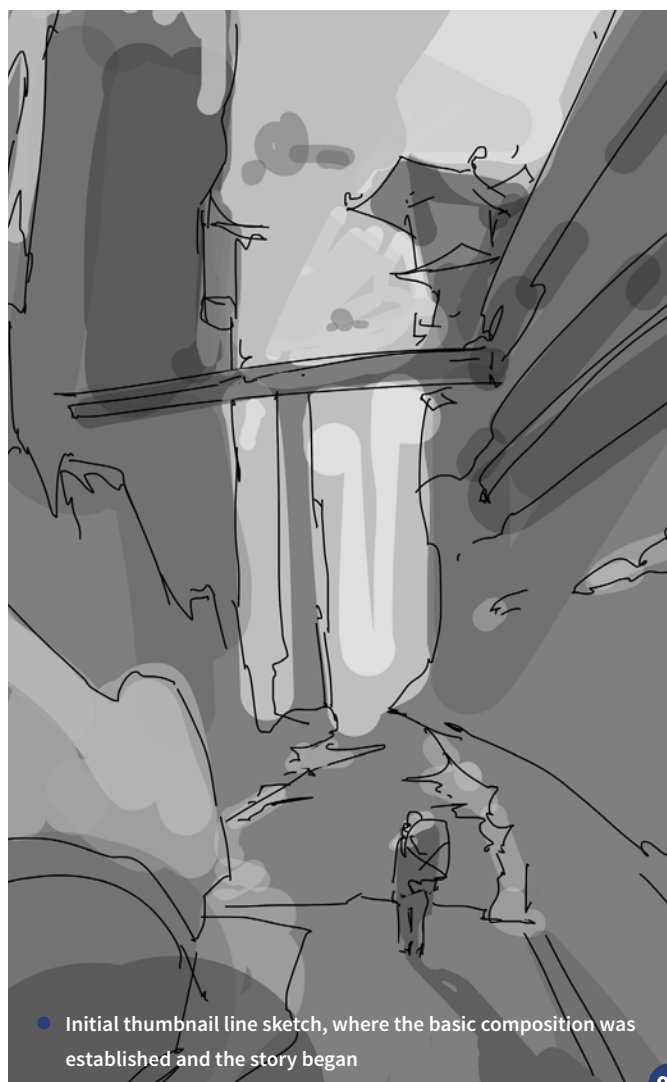
As for the light effects, I knew it would nicely hit the protruding edges of the canyon walls and keep the underneath relatively in shadow, creating pools of light and contrast through the snow.

"I looked for subjects such as light and cloud formations near mountains, which always have a beautiful way of forming and moving"

Referencing

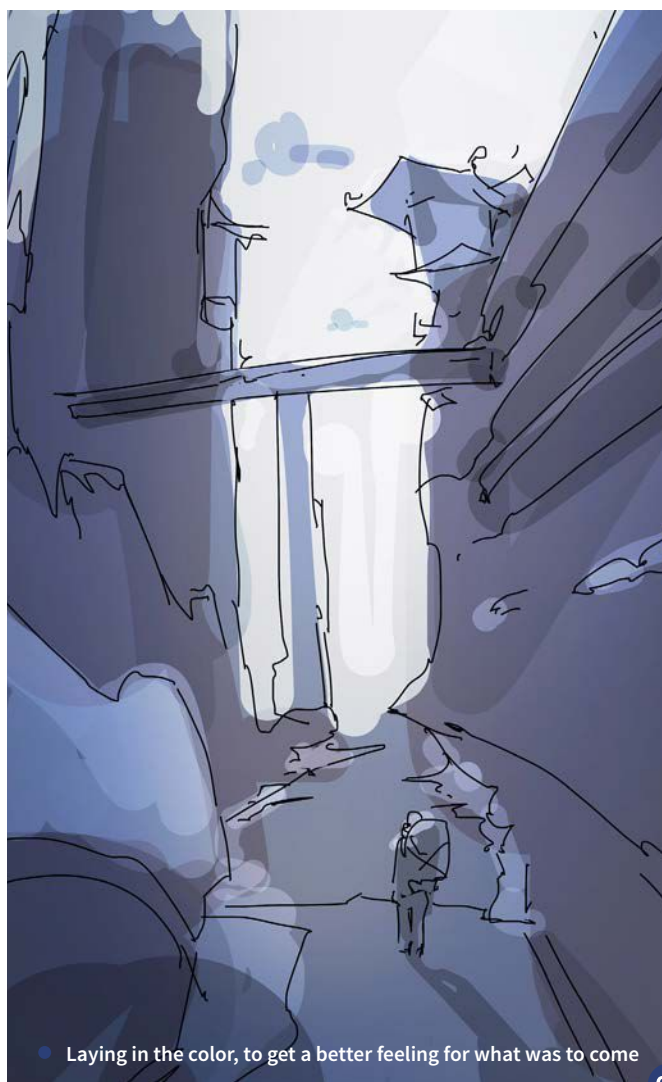
This is a very important step for me and I take my time with it. If I already have something in mind, as I did with this, I start referencing situations that would be close to my intention. For this image I looked for subjects such as light and cloud formations near mountains, which always have a beautiful way of forming and moving because of the clashing air. Rocks with plenty of snow also helped me to see how snowfall follows the shapes of rock formations and mountains, creating beautiful abstract patterns – all this could help me establish a strong composition.

It was very important when doing the rocks to keep them in the same family; from how they formed to how they eroded.



Initial thumbnail line sketch, where the basic composition was established and the story began

01



Laying in the color, to get a better feeling for what was to come

02



● Example of how to use a photograph and turn it into something you need

Of course, they could be combined with totally different rocks and therefore give contrast, but as different as they may be, you have to follow your visual gut in order for them to work.

Making use of photographs

Because the image was composed mostly of snow-covered rocks, I wanted to show a quick process of transforming a photo, mood, season, and shape in order to fit your purpose. It's basically the same process I later used to finish Inner Search.

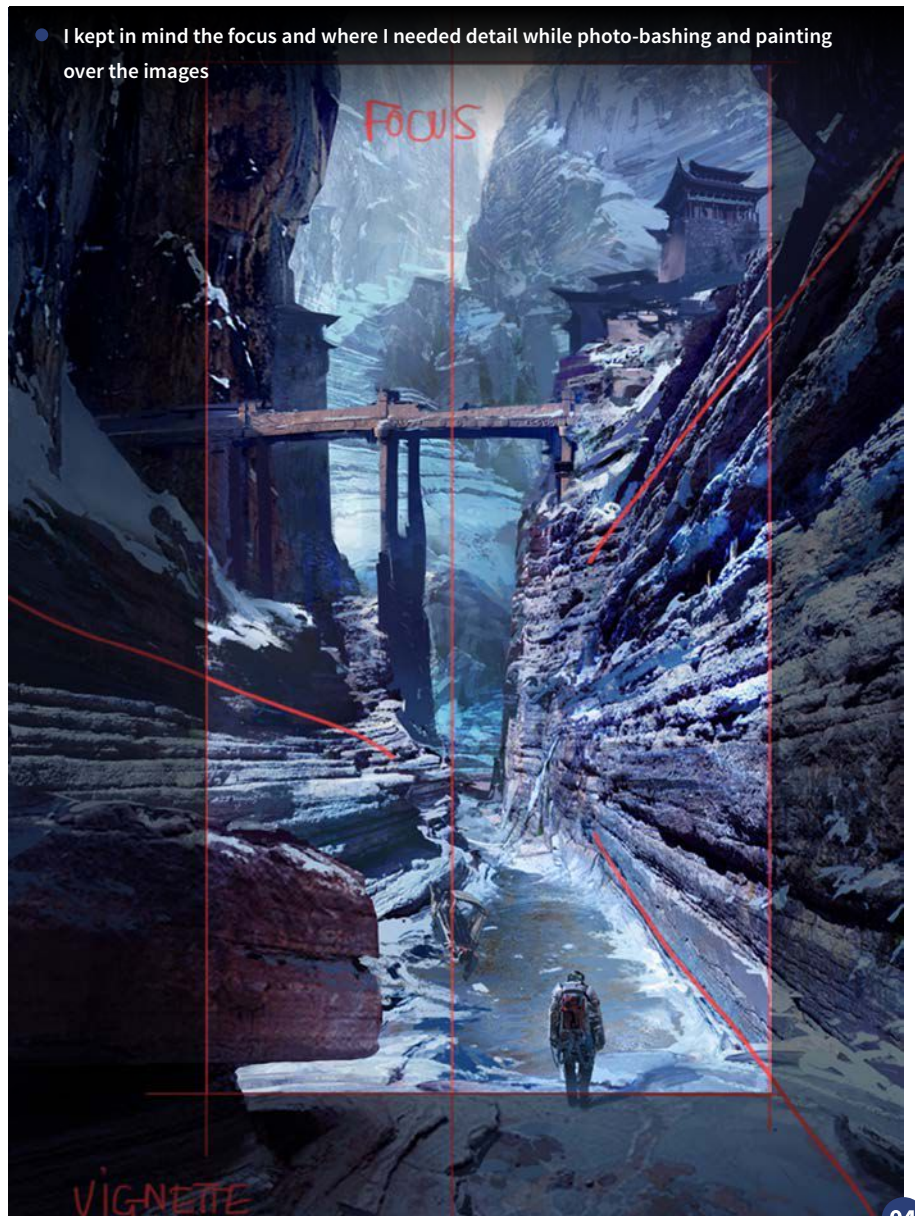
I basically took the image and first of all started playing around with the color. Once I had retained the reds and added the blues, I had that frozen kind of tone I wanted to go for. For this you could use whatever does the job, from Hue/Saturation, Color Balance, Curves, Layer modes and so on. Just experiment and have fun.

Silhouetting

As with most of the design work in an image, the silhouette is of top importance. Always pay attention to your silhouette; the smallest mark can create an interesting edge or shape definition. In this case, I broke apart big shapes with light and shadow, or by creating holes inside the rocks. You must always follow the flow of the rock to retain the energy, which will help your overall shape and composition.

Now that I had the shapes in place, I added the snow and ice around most of the horizontal surfaces, further defining the shapes. Any painting ►

● I kept in mind the focus and where I needed detail while photo-bashing and painting over the images



“I wanted to connect the bridge to an outpost to indicate that the traveler was on the right track”

is formed by dozens of micro compositions, and they all need to be interesting and keep the eye moving. They must serve the overall composition. You can observe that there were a lot of nuances in the snow. Try not to colorpick within your painting until you have a wide variety of colors and saturations as this creates richness. This should be applied to monochrome images as well. After a few hours of photo-bashing, and following the techniques described previously, things were starting to shape up. I had a clear composition and focus using perspective and the rock elements as a natural vignette. Now it was time for some story. I wanted to

connect the bridge to an outpost to indicate that the traveler was on the right track.

Adding points of interest

On the far mountain I thought it would be cool to have a vertical wall and some Hanging Temples (similar to the temples of Hunyuan Xuankong in China). This idea, as the endpoint of the whole story/composition, would go through different variations and iterations until it matched my vision of the whole image. Now that the overall composition was there, the balancing act could begin.

First of all, I wanted to get settled on the background, as the vertical wall started to look boring, so I went for a different idea of a temple sitting on the summit of the wall. I made room on the side, cutting through the canyon rock.

Atmospherics

I imagined that this far up in the mountains there would be a lot of mist forming, so I began pushing things back a little. I tried having fun with some new tower-like temples with weird contraptions on them.

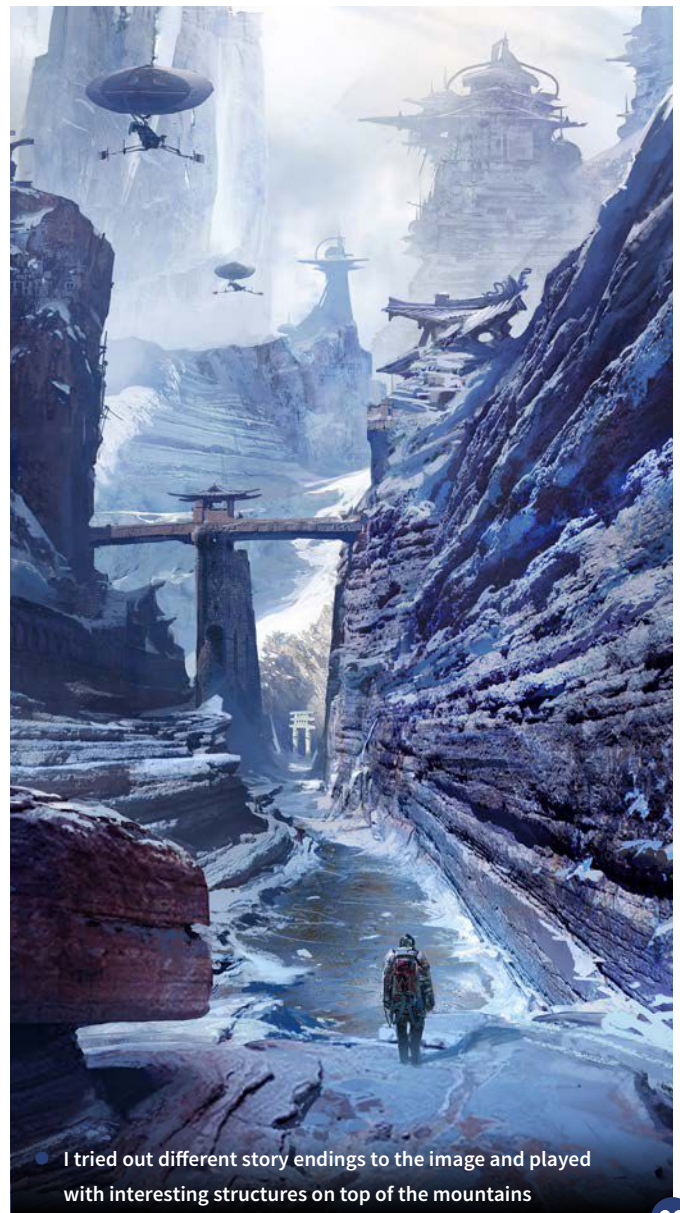
Don't be afraid of change

I realized that the huge temples undermined the impression of a road to serenity and Shangri-La: a perfect land. Nature itself is perfect and people that understood that would always build things that respected nature. With this in mind, I created more abstract rock shapes that would give this impression. I often flip images to check the composition as this can create a totally different image. I did so with this image and preferred this version, so I stuck with the new flipped image. ●



● Starting to refine and build on what I already had

05



● I tried out different story endings to the image and played with interesting structures on top of the mountains

06



The Artist



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